Critical Self-Theory

& the non-ideological critique of ideology

Jason McQuinn

Spring-Summer 2014

Contents

Critical Self-Theory **3**

Self-theory . . . 5
Anatomy of self-theory . . . 7
Theory and language . . . 8
Recognition and reification . . . 9
Heteronomous theory and ideology . . . 12
Anatomy of heteronomous theory . . . 13
Primitive, ancient and modern slavery . . . 14
Engendered resistance to slavery . . . 15
Critical theory: The development of immanent critique . . . 16
Critical theory: Reclaiming autonomy . . . 17
Heteronomous *critical* theory . . . 18
Critical theory: Marxist social theory . . . 20
Postmodern critical theory: Structuralist and post-structuralist ideologies . . . 22
Ideological critiques of ideology: Recuperation through *critical* ideologies . . . 24
Slave theory: Religion, philosophy and ideology . . . 24
The *reversal* of perspective: From self-alienating heteronomy to lived autonomy . . . 27
Making a *first distinction* . . . 30
Anatomy of critical self-theory . . . 31
Critical self-theory . . . 32

A brief history of theory **34**

Critical Self-Theory

& the non-ideological critique of ideology

> "Free — from what? Oh! what is there that cannot be shaken off? The yoke of serfdom, of sovereignty, of aristocracy and princes, the dominion of the desires and passions; yes, even the dominion of one's own will, of self-will, for the completest self-denial is nothing but freedom — freedom, namely, from self-determination, from one's own self. And the craving for freedom as for something absolute, worthy of every praise, deprived us of ownness: it created self-denial. However, the freer I become, the more compulsion piles up before my eyes; and the more impotent I feel myself. The unfree son of the wilderness does not yet feel anything of all the limits that crowd a civilized man: he seems to him-self freer than this latter. In the measure that I conquer freedom for myself I create for myself new bounds and new tasks: if I have invented railroads, I feel myself weak again because I cannot yet sail through the skies like the bird; and, if I have solved a problem whose obscurity disturbed my mind, at once there await me innumerable others, whose perplexities impede my progress, dim my free gaze, make the limits of my freedom painfully sensible to me." — Max Stirner, *The Unique and Its Own* (1844)

Critical self-theory is intentionally presuppositionless, non-ideological theory. It is, most broadly, *consciously or critically thinking for oneself*. It includes the set of all non-ideological critiques of ideology. As such, it is the only consistently self-critical and non-self-alienating form of theory — including critical theory.[1] By default it is a libertarian or anarchistic theory, if only because it begins not just from outside any and all ideological premises, but by definition from each of our own lived experiences in opposition to every form of dependency or enslavement — that is, to every self-alienating form of institutional or ideological submission. It is the critical theory of the common person and common people, and not of the privileged elite or their lackeys — who attain their status through their complicity with the institutions of modern slavery — because through it we refuse any identification with these institutions. It is the critical theory of the insurrectionary who rejects all overlords, not of the ideological revolutionary who seeks to install a new form of overlordship. It is never the theory of the academic, expert, professional or bureaucrat, the politician, boss or ideologue — when you can even distinguish one of these roles from the others these days.[2] It is the particular, conscious expression of the everyday rationalities that are not just embedded in our lives but — more importantly and accurately — are created, revealed and expressed through *all* of our life-activities. It is, therefore, for each of us — to the extent that we *do* refuse ideology — also our own non-ideological theory

[1] Critical self-theory is not a pre-constructed theory that is after-the-fact given the name "critical self-theory." It is merely the name for what it fits and what fits it: intentionally (conceptually) presuppositionless, non-dogmatic self-theory. Any non-ideological critique of ideology or any non-ideological critique of everyday life, or any self-critical self-theory is necessarily entailed through use of the name "critical self-theory" by this definition. Conceptual presuppositionlessness entails a refusal of any dogma — of any metaphysics or ontology, of any fixed epistemology, and of any compulsory *a prioris*, laws, absolutes or moralities.

[2] This is not to say that no person who ever accepts a job as an academic, expert, professional, etc. can ever construct or understand critical self-theory. But no person can do so while seriously identifying themselves and their lives with some particular role as academic, expert or professional. Critical self-theory is the theory of those who do not unself-critically subject themselves to any sort of symbolic abstractions, including roles. They may use roles, but they always understand they are not and cannot actually be those roles. To the extent people are able to submit to

and critique of everyday life, just as it includes the entire set of non-ideological critiques of each of our own everyday lives. Through it we make no pretense to any final religious, metaphysical or scientific universality. There is no need to do so, since it applies first and always to our own lives (including our relations with others) in order to express anything and everything that we each understand and know, including the implicit limits of our understanding and symbolic knowledge. Critical self-theory is a type of consciously practical (instrumental) activity and thus has no goal of its own outside of how we each choose to use it or not. It makes no demands on us — whether religious, metaphysical, moral or ideological — since it is our own situated, critical thinking about our world, through which we refuse pretense to anything else. Because it begins from our Own non-conceptual lives as their expressions, it can be used to facilitate our rebellion against every possible form of fixed ideology or institutional domination and exploitation. It is thus the most consistent form of conscious resistance to the ideological foundations of the ubiquitous institutions of modern slavery — upon which modern civilization is always founded, both historically and organizationally. And, as such, it can also facilitate our self-liberation from all the institutions of that enslavement: the liberation of our thinking, our activities and our relationships, each on our own terms in our own manner to whatever extent we have and use our own powers with and without others.

One could — naively — ask why anyone would ever really need anything that could be called "critical self-theory"? However, the far more interesting question for all of us ought to be why, in a world awash in mountains of theory of nearly every type and description, no one ever speaks of such a thing, even as a possibility? What is it about theory that, even when it claims to be critical, the prefix "self" is automatically to be avoided? Is this more indicative of an innocent oversight or a highly revealing taboo? Why do we have religious theories (doctrines and theologies) for every sect and schism large and small, philosophical theories for principles (fixed conceptions) of every shade and hue, scientistic theories (reifying instrumentalist conceptions of natural and social processes) throughout the entire spectrum of the sciences, and professional theories for every semi-respectable institutional con-game around, but no recognized name for the theory for our own lives, beholden to no outside, heteronomous organizations, forces or powers? Why is ideology so ubiquitous, but our own non-ideological thought kept so invisible?

Self-theory

Self-theory is, most broadly, thinking for oneself — though not necessarily consciously or critically.[3] At the most fundamental levels each of us can experience our world practically from

and lose themselves in compulsory roles, critical theory will be absent.

[3] Self-theory includes what is sometimes termed the "natural attitude" in phenomenology and the sociology of knowledge, though without any of their dogmatic presuppositions. Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann's *The Social Construction of Reality* (1966) is an example of the various phenomenological and sociological perspectives on everyday life and the constitution of social reality that *claim* to describe our experience, but completely fail to adequately capture the most fundamental and important relations and conflicts between the pre-conceptual and conceptual levels of experience, between recognition and reification, and between self-ownership and self-alienation. And with no logical justification, Berger and Luckmann insist on positing a reified "social objectivity" rather than an intersubjectively constituted objectivity. Incredibly they in all seriousness propose — with no evidence besides a vague reference to the structuralist fantasies of Lévy-Bruhl, Lévi-Strauss and Piaget — a speculative philosophy of history in which "the original apprehension of the social world is highly reified" and that "*de*reification in consciousness … is a relatively late development in history"! (p. 90) They simply give no explanation how reification could precede the recognitions reified.

only one possible perspective — for each of us our *own perspective*, shaped through our own inalienable, embodied sensation-and-movement-in-our-world. These fundamental levels of practical experience are always present, though rarely themselves a focus of observation or discussion. Yet even within these most fundamental levels of experience, a primitive sort of theory already exists prior to the development and use of explicitly symbolic systems like languages. (This becomes obvious with the more social species of mammals, especially the primates and hominids.) In fact, all explicitly symbolic systems rest upon these levels of tacit, preconceptual, experiential understanding.

When we move to the level of symbolic systems, there are *two* possible perspectives through which we can view or portray our world *theoretically*. The first would be, once again, for each of us through our *own*, embodied, personally lived, first-person perspective. The second — though it could be considered and labeled a number of different ways — we can most simply classify as any other *imagined* perspective, whether we imagine it as seeming to actually exist somewhere in time and space, or instead as something purely fictional existing outside of our own lives and worlds, but nowhere specific at all. Imagined perspectives can include anything and everything from those of our own selves construed as objects (in our self-reflection or self-consciousness) or those of other people, to those of spirits or gods or those of grand abstractions like Nature or Society, to those of particular groups or organizations.[4] The most important aspect of the relationship of people's *self-theories* to *theories focused on imaginary perspectives* is the necessity for the latter to always rest on the foundation of the former — and never vice versa, because all imagined perspectives must be constructed from our own original, lived perspectives. But if we take a close look at the great majority of the theories people consciously hold in modern societies — whether social, scientific or technical, religious, political or economic, aesthetic or moral, we tend to find — especially in the more highly-regimented, industrialized societies — that they most often center on and are organized around imaginary perspectives rather than our own implicit, lived perspectives. This may not really be unexpected, since many of these theories involve highly intricate, highly-rationalized modes of apprehension, classification, interpretation, negotiation and interaction with complex natural and cultural objects, as well as with other people who are also required to operate on a similarly sophisticated level of cultural and institutional practice. However, when we actually apply these theories in our lives we always have to reinterpret them by shifting to the more fundamental level of immediately practical, first-person theory in order to incorporate them into our actually-lived perspectives and thus make them usable for us. On the level where we must decide what to do, where to go, when to communicate, and how to go about pursuing complex projects — on the level of this fundamental, actually-lived, practical activity — we can't rely on theories centered on merely imaginary perspectives. We need to translate them into an immanent level that includes — and centers on — our own practical sensations, perceptions, understanding, motivations values and powers. This is always the nearly-unspoken, but unavoidable, level of self-theory. Though it must also be pointed out that the "self" in "self-theory" doesn't denote any objectified concept of the self. It instead denotes the autonomous generation and deployment of theory — theory implicitly and wholly engaged

[4] Because they are never directly experienced by us we can only imagine what these perspectives are like by putting ourselves in their centers through fantasizing, although we can gain more or less realism in the Process by making analogies between our actually-lived experiences and those we are constructing with our imagination. That this is the case even for constructing ideas of how other people's perspectives appear in their wn experience should be obvious, even if it is usually unacknowledged.

within our life-activity, and thus self-created seamlessly within our own lived perspectives. Even though this fundamental level of theory is itself very rarely described or explicitly theorized, we could not function without the most fundamental levels of self-theory. Without self-theory, the interface between all the theories centered on other imagined perspectives, values, goals and our own life-activities would be at best highly disjointed and incoherent, or even impossible. But, what is more interesting is the very fact that this plethora of other-focused theories has become so prevalent, to the extent of seeming to increasingly displace and overwhelm what in the past must have been once the primary — and at an even earlier time (before the creation of symbolic communication) the only — mode of theory. It should not be unexpected that with the ever-increasing displacement of self-theory (by imagined theories) and as part of this same development, we have also seen ever-increasing levels of self-alienation, disorientation and anomie in modern societies.

Anatomy of self-theory

Self-theory is the theoretical moment of our self-activity, and our self-activity is the self-creation of our lives. At the pre-symbolic level (we could say "pre-theoretical" level), our self-theory (or self-pre-theory) can be seen as higher level organismic functioning that involves complex adaptation and organization of perceptual-motor abilities (including communicative efforts) to live in our world (our natural and social life context). At this level the schematic anatomy of self-theory is: nonsymbolic-desire-or-problem *therefore* particular-practical-activity. To the extent that the practical activity is satisfactory (satisfies the desire or solves the problem) its use is reinforced as an option for similar situations. To the extent that it is unsatisfactory, it may be reconfigured or even avoided in similar future situations. Note that in this typical self-theory schematic there is no real need for consideration of the nature or meaning of any abstract concepts like self or world. All that is involved is purely practical reason using implicit, embodied subjectivity and implicit, practical objects (not requiring complex or abstract symbolic constitution in a foundational, structural symbolic field), a practical reason that is implicit in our self-creative life-activity, and not to be found or applied from outside.

Interestingly, at more complex, symbolic levels our self-theory *remains characterizable* as higher level organismic functioning that involves complex adaptation and organization of perceptual-motor abilities (including communicative efforts) to live in our world (our natural and social life context). The only difference is that any communicative efforts now include to some degree the use of symbols or symbolic systems. At this level the schematic anatomy of self-theory is: complex-nonsymbolic+symbolic-desire-or-problem *therefore* practical-activity-including-symbolic-activity. To the extent that the practical-symbolic activity is satisfactory (satisfies the desire and/or solves the problem) its use is reinforced as an option for similar situations. To the extent that the activity is unsatisfactory, it may be reconfigured or even avoided in similar future situations. Note that in this typical complex self-theory schematic there is most often still no real need for consideration of the nature or meaning of any abstract concepts like self or world. All that is involved is still purely practical reason, though a practical reason that may include complex symbolic operations, and that is implicit in our self-creative life-activity, although some theoretical aspects may be found and/or applied from outside. These

latter theoretical aspects include parts of other people's self-theories or *imagined* theories which must then be appropriated for personal, practical use.

Theory and language

We often only speak of theory as existing once symbolic systems exist in which it can be independently embodied, even though — as we have seen — something very like theory, which we might then call "pre-theory" or "the pre-theoretical," must also exist — as the base upon which the constructions of symbolically-embodied theory can be constructed.[5] This all depends upon our definitions and understandings of the nature of concepts and their relationship to symbols and language. But regardless of where we might want to draw distinctions here, it is abundantly clear that most of what is commonly called "theory" is directly dependent for its existence on language systems. This makes our understanding of the nature and development of language-use a central part of our understanding and critique of theory. Just as critical self-theory is based on the conscious use of theory — considered as a purely human, self-constructed set of techniques, it is also based on our similar understanding of language-use.

For each of us, individually, it can seem as though we are born into an already complete linguistic *system* (or into complete *systems*, for the multi-lingual). But upon critical examination we find this is not at all the case. Just as when we take a genuinely self-critical approach to theory we recognize it is not something created — already complete and handed down to us — by gods, genes, society or any other reified entities, we also recognize that language is not something created and handed down to us by any of these reified entities. Instead, since language does not exist for us as a thing-in-itself, but only as a highly variable, disparate and ever-changing collection of practices of relatively independent human beings acting in varying relationships to each other, there is no — and can be no — complete system of any particular language that we can ever locate — even ideally — in any one place. Instead, what we actually find phenomenally or empirically is the collection of linguistic practices engaged in by each and all of those individuals using different languages in whatever ways and for whatever purposes they wish. Recognized in

[5] When I speak of "pre-theory" or "the pre-theoretical" I'm not speaking of pre-theoretical "beliefs," "intuitions" or "commitments," but of embodied or lived preconceptual or pre-theoretical *techniques* of perceptual-motor judgement that operate on a cognitive level prior to (what is usually included in the idea of) conception or of any objectified systems of symbolization like languages. From critical, non-ideological perspectives, there is simply nowhere else for symbolically-embodied theory to find a foundation other than in an already-existing pre-theoretical, embodied rationality. However, that does not mean there aren't plenty of other areas or contexts where the descriptor "pre-theoretical" won't be perfectly appropriate for use as well. For one example, the "common sense" — where primitive consciousness originates in humans and other animals — of Aristotle (see *De Anima*) seems to be close to or overlap with "pre-theory" as used here. For another example, although critical self-theory rejects the reifications of psycho-analytic theories, the pre-theoretical can be seen as similar to psycho-analytic "primary process." And especially relevant are descriptions of perceptual-motor function in Gestalt psychology and Gestalt phenomenology, for example in the work of Maurice Merleau-Ponty. More importantly, the pre-theoretical can be conceived as a level of highly-organized perceptual-motor cognition between simple sensorimotor (non-cognitive reflex) functions and complex conceptual cognition and symbolization. This level of perceptual-motor coordination and cognition can arguably be described in *either* non-conceptual or conceptual terms, depending upon the definition of "concept" employed, but in either case it is certainly non- or extra-linguistic in its function, since it doesn't require language acquisition. One final note: the "pre-theoretical" herein is definitely not equivalent to the concept under this name employed by Berger and Luckmann (see note 3 above), which appears to apply more to informal, incomplete or primitive theorization rather than what is actually *prior to* (pre-) theory.

this light it becomes clear that structuralist (and post-structuralist[6]) dogmas regarding language have no basis beyond the extent of their reification of actually-existing language-use.

When we look at how people actually acquire linguistic competence, we see that it is a process of *mutual* communication and action. Children don't mechanically memorize words and their meanings, learn the rules of grammar, and then start talking on that basis. They engage in a complex process of interactive, experimental, communicative give and take, just as they do in all other facets of learning about their parents, their siblings and the environments in which they find and create themselves. Just as children's pre-theoretical interactions provide the foundation for the development of symbolic theory, their prelinguistic communication provides the foundation for language development. Children are already active agents engaged in developing their own self-theory as they explore their worlds. They don't need to be taught language since they are already involved in learning how to communicate, as one aspect of their explorations through which they gain increasing understanding and abilities to manipulate their worlds. This means that in practice they develop their own linguistic abilities by *re-creating for themselves* language-systems comparable and compatible with the language-uses to which they are exposed and interact. As they come into contact with more and more people throughout their lives their own language systems and linguistic competencies deepen to whatever extent they successfully communicate and manipulate their environment using their language skills to expand their own language systems. Language-use and self-theory are seamlessly integrated parts of this communication and manipulation.

Recognition and reification

At the dividing point between every self-theory and imagined theory are choices that we continuously make. From a consciously critical perspective these decisions are not objectively evaluable as right or wrong, true or false, rational or irrational. They are instead basic existential choices reflecting each of our own attitudes towards our lives and worlds, just as our attitudes in turn reflect the history of our manifold choices. Through these choices we determine to what extent we prefer to navigate our worlds through recognition (practical understanding through interaction and dialogue) or reification (indirect, reified modes of recognition). There may be reasons that we can give or discover for which of these we choose in any particular instance, but whichever we choose remains an existential choice in the social and historical processes of our self-creation.

Recognition is the self-creative process through which we discover our worlds — and, especially, ourselves and other beings as autonomous agents in our worlds. It includes every aspect or moment of our interactions with everything with which we interact. It describes the dialogic process of understanding we undergo in each of our encounters, in which we learn the extent of our own powers and the powers of objects, including the extent of their abilities to act intentionally. There is no guarantee that any given human being will ever recognize him or herself or others, given the possible failure of this developmental process through accident, death or disease. But some form of recognition of the agency of other persons is necessary for any form of social

[6] Critical self-theory is definitely not post-structuralist, a very wide-ranging category of philosophical, literary and social theories and practices that are possibly most united by their celebration of never-ending levels of reifying obfuscation through intractable denial of the possibility of self-creative autonomy.

life, and otherwise healthy infants already begin the process of personal recognition (especially voice recognition) even before birth and vastly expand their powers of recognition upon birth. Recognition requires at its most basic level the direct or indirect encounter and perceptual-motor engagement with an object. As such, recognition in its entirety can be seen as coterminous with life-experience itself (and we can imagine this as being the case down to the simplest forms of life like prokaryotes or even viruses). Beyond basic recognition of relatively inanimate objects, it also extends to animate, living objects: ourselves and other living beings, who are distinguished from the relatively inanimate world by some degree of autonomous agency. Although none of us can directly experience the autonomous agency of another (or we would then *be* that other), we all have the power to recognize our own agency and the agencies of others in our day to day interactions over our lifetimes. We recognize our own agency directly — through our experience of our own interactions with others — and others' agencies indirectly through those same interactions by constructing them imaginatively and reflectively by analogy with our direct experiences.

Reification is the interactive process through which we can reduce our full experience of recognition in some way in order to make it more abstract or passive, less intense or direct, or interpret it as less real by rationalizing (conceptually fixing or hypostatizing) one or more aspects of the experience. Rationalizing reification involves *choosing* a reductionist, self-alienating (disowned) mode of recognition rather than a wider, non-reductionist, non-self-alienating (owned or self-responsible) mode. Although it is rarely analyzed, the process of rationalizing reification necessarily (analytically) includes two correlative moments (mirroring the two central moments into which our life-experience is generally analyzed, the objective and the subjective): a reductive moment and an animative moment. This is because it is precisely our life-experience that is reified, and our life experience can always be described in terms of subjective and objective sides, aspects or moments. On the one side an activity is *reduced* to a passive object, and on the other side the activity that is removed from the then passively-constructed object is projected onto a *symbolic agent*. The two great archetypal models for reification in practice are slavery and religion: slaves and spirits.[7] By *reducing* the actual agency of humans, other living beings, or natural objects of our experience to the status of slaves, symbolic agents are created — from that newly appropriated agency — in the form of imagined statuses, fetishes or spirits (the imagined *status* of slave owner, the imagined *sanction* of slave-ownership by gods, or the imagined *granting* of slave-ownership by law, for example) or institutions (imagined, symbolic group spirits). Reification can be employed consciously or not. As long as it is deployed for a particular purpose with awareness of its limitations as a truncated form of recognition (that it is an imaginary, conceptually-mediated process), it can allow people to take particular behaviors largely for granted under certain conditions and contexts, allowing people to focus their practical activity and consciousness on other more significant areas. However, when it becomes habitual — through repeated obsessive-compulsive or compulsory-submissive behavior — and no longer consciously purposeful, reified forms of recognition can be mistaken for fully-attentive recog-

[7] Slaves are reduced to relative, dependent objects, while gods are invested with imagined animate, independent life. Slaves are in turn the archetypal paradigm for modern machines under control of the priests of technocracy. The development of complex technologies begins with the correlative development of enslavement (systematically reductive recognition) and religion (the systematic self-alienation of agency) in tandem — in domestication of animals and plants, the systematic domination (and exploitation) of dependents (children, women, etc), and the systematic enslavement of humans. Each of these practices depends at a certain level of intensity on the reifications provided by the religious self-alienation of agency.

nition and this can lead people to begin believing that the reifications are more "real" than the evidence of their own senses — especially when forms of reification are reinforced by large-scale institutional systems of ideology, coercion, exploitation and enslavement. Given how completely essential reification has become for ensuring the voluntarily submissive behavior required for the maintenance of all the institutions of modern slavery, there is now hardly any aspect of contemporary life left untouched. (See Ron Sakolsky's "Mutual Acquiescence" in *MS* #1.) With habitual reification nearly everywhere, examples abound. Pick any aspect of life where forced labor, domination, mass culture or ideology is found (pretty much anywhere) and reification is right in the center of things helping glue it all together. Here are two examples.

Wage work (wage slavery). Wage work requires unfree, relatively unconscious and nonrebellious people to consistently act as slaves in workplaces, but ignore the fact that if they wanted to they could organize and live for themselves instead of allowing state-regulated capitalist businesses to so easily rule their lives, control most of their productive powers and render them robotic. In order to *become* workers (as opposed to reluctantly choosing to work while refusing and resisting identification with the role of worker), people agree to treat their own life-activities as not their own, as owned by their bosses or hierarchy. They *reduce* their own lives (and those of everyone else inside workplaces) to a large degree to the status of productive machines, and in the process give capitalist managers and state regulators at all levels the gift of their *workday agency* by imagining that they (and others) have no choice but to submit to the daily wage-slavery regime. What is called "the economy" in capitalist, socialist and communist societies consists of all the institutions of forced labor, and rests on such reifications at every level of their existence.

Commodity consumption. Instead of freely cooperating with others to directly produce and distribute the essentials we need to live — food, clothing and shelter, production and distribution of these essentials are basically outlawed outside of their state and corporate ownership and regulation (through refusal of people's autonomy, forced denial of access to materials and opportunities to create them, and elimination of commons and unregulated wilderness). These essentials are then mass produced, commoditized and rationed through heavily rigged and unfree (but euphemistically called "regulated" or "free") markets (usually under the names of "capitalism" or "socialism" of one form or another), or they are mass produced, commoditized and rationed more directly through bureaucratic channels in more dictatorial economies (as in "communist" North Korea). In each case people largely *reduce* their life-activities (and those of other people) to the required roles of largely passive "consumers" within the respective modes of rationing in the societies in which they live. Once again they make a gift of their self-alienated *agency* to the organizers and enforcers of their respective rationing institutions (through the mediation of imagined, symbolic identities under which the institutions operate). Since participants in these institutions often perceive them as more real than the people involved, they then begin to treat other people and themselves as mere institutional cogs.

These examples are all fairly complex, each involving multiple levels of reification in which people are reduced to roles and expected to act in particular venues in compulsive and repetitive, machine-like ways. People are expected to treat other people the same ways they treat themselves, in order to maintain and expand multiple subsystems along with the overall systems in which they operate. These examples are also remarkably effective and we see little conscious protest at their overall modes of operation, and even relatively little protest of often quite obvious particular problems in their everyday operation. This is because those who participate have

largely refused to ever become conscious of their own self-alienated participation in the constitution and reproduction of these reified systems.

Heteronomous theory and ideology

Heteronomous theory[8] is, most broadly, thinking for oneself through submission to theories centered somewhere else besides one's own life (on imagined, often symbolic, agents) — through the self-alienation (disowning) of one's perspective. Heteronomous theory is another name for ideological theory (in the most generally *critical* sense of the word "ideology"). The descriptor "heteronomous" denotes "subjection to something else" or "subject to a law or standard external to itself."[9] "Ideology," on the other hand, originally comes from its use by Antoine Destutt de Tracy (1796) as a term for the study or science of ideas. However, it is an extremely contested word, meaning that different people use it in widely different ways for vastly different reasons. It first acquired its enduring negative connotation through Napoleon's condemnation of "the ideologues" of the French Convention (including de Tracy) who opposed his edicts. Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels then popularized (mostly) critical forms of the concept that continue to be primary influences on its uses today.[10] During its long history, the major struggle has been between positive (or neutral) and negative (or critical) conceptions and uses of the term. It will here be used in its most general critical form to refer to *imposed idea systems* (heteronomous theory) in contradistinction to autonomous use of ideas (autonomous — or self — theory). Despite the obvious centrality of the distinction between *imposed external idea systems* and *the implicit, autonomous use of theory* for any genuinely conscious and critical investigation and discussion of the meanings of ideology, this distinction is generally evaded or ignored. Just as with the absence of any significant investigation or discussion of the existence and nature of self-theory, the critical conception of ideology as heteronomous theory is also largely invisible. This is because first of all the entire organizational structure of modern civilization is fundamentally reliant on the free and unquestioned functioning of a multitude of competing and cooperating heteronomous theories and the reifications on which they are built. This fact is a central part of the ultimate public secret of the modern world. The secret that cannot ever officially be named for what it is: *modern slavery*. At the heart of modern slavery, at the heart of every institutionalization of the enslavement of human beings in modern society, is the transubstantiation (reification) of life through the self-alienation and appropriation of agency (people's self-reduction to passive objects submitting to imagined symbolic statuses or agents). To *be* a slave (as opposed to being

[8] In music theory, the term "heteronomous theory" has its own technical meaning, and refers to music having extrinsic meaning or meaning outside itself, rather than intrinsic meaning. Thus the meaning for music theory is rather the opposite of intrinsic rather than the opposite of autonomous, as it is employed here and — at least since Kant — in critical theory. (See Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* [1785].)

[9] For example, as given in the *Merriam-Webster Dictionary* or the *New Oxford American Dictionary*.

[10] Marx's original references to "ideology" are scattered, undeveloped and inconsistent, given that they were not apparently intended to be central parts of Marx's theory. They were primarily used for ad hoc polemical critique of what Marx and Engels saw as the competing theories of other post-Hegelians: Ludwig Feuerbach, Bruno Bauer and Max Stirner. There is a vast literature on the subject exploring the inconsistency and incoherence of Marxist views that I intend to survey in the future. Suffice it to say here that a careful study of a founding (though late-published) text of Marxism, *Die Deutsche Ideologie* (written 1846, published 1932), reveals that the Marxist conception(s) of ideology primarily derive precisely from Marx's failed attempt at disposing of Max Stirner's critique of heteronomous theory in *Der Einzige und sein Eigenthum* (1844), which makes up the bulk of Marx and Engels' text.

captured and continuing to consciously resist one's captor) is in practice to *identify oneself* as a slave (under whatever name) and to accept the control of one's activities by those who have appropriated one's self-alienated agency. The function of every ideology — from religions to liberalism, from nationalisms to Marxism or even libertarianism — is to symbolically formulate this transubstantiation of life in relatively fixed dogmas that sugarcoat the required submissive and self-reductive moments. And, for this transubstantiation of life to be effective, any genuine self-understanding of the existence and nature of self-theory and heteronomous theory, the self-alienation of agency, or their places in the ubiquitous social constitution of institutions of modern slavery must be suppressed by all those who participate in the maintenance and reproduction of these institutions. Each individual ideology or heteronomous theory may or may not be open to questioning or criticism, depending upon how liberal the ruling regime might be. But regardless of any possible openness to particular questions and critiques, all regimes will attempt to suppress non-ideological criticism of ideologies along with both theoretical and practical critiques of currently favored forms of modern slavery.

Anatomy of heteronomous theory

If *self*-theory is the theoretical moment of our *self*-activity, and our *self*-activity is the *self*-creation of our lives, *heteronomous* (or ideological) theory is the theoretical moment of our *self-alienated* activity, or the *self-alienation* of our *self*-theory. Because our pre-symbolic or pre-theoretical activities are entirely immanent and inseparable from our physical, bodily activities, it is extremely uncommon for people to *self-alienate* their *self*-activity at the pre-symbolic or pre-theoretical levels of life except in extreme situations (in which intense fear, pain, violence or suffering may possibly lead to dissociative experiences). However, once people develop complex, socially-interactive cognitive abilities to richly *imagine* (reconstruct, or *recognize*) other perspectives that other people (and other nonhuman living beings) appear to hold analogous to their own, it becomes a much easier step to further *imagine* that one is beholden to other, more speculatively constructed, fetishized statuses or beings. The beginnings of complex symbolic communication through development of languages must have sooner or later led to the prehistoric *imaginative recognition* of not only human kin, but animal and plant kin, and even kinship with natural objects, materials and land- and water-forms (rivers, lakes, valleys, mountains). But, eventually, this sensible, understandable and in many ways very useful animist consciousness had to have extended beyond everyday sensory interactions to more tenuously *imagined* encounters (influenced by dreams and altered forms of consciousness) with *living*-dead ancestors, ghosts, nature-spirits and eventually gods. As long as each of these *imagined* perspectives remained useful or enjoyable as finite, speculative constructions in story-telling and primitive attempts at empirical natural explanation their animism did not require self-alienation. But it was with the birth of religion — in the sense of *fixed belief* in the extra- or supernatural *reality* of such entities — that self-alienation on a cognitive level initially appears to have taken hold. With the birth of religion people abandoned their own personal and immediately communitarian uses of their conceptual creations and instead *imagined* that some self-alienated conceptual creations were even more real than their own lives. It is this inside-out relation of conceptual creations over their human creators that defines conceptual self-alienation and heteronomous or ideological theory.

At the level of heteronomous theory our self-theory still *remains characterizable* as higher level organismic functioning that involves complex adaptation and organization of perceptual-motor abilities (including both presymbolic and symbolic communicative efforts) to live in our world (our natural and social life context). The big difference is that our world itself has now been turned inside-out conceptually and a level of non-sensible, imagined being is prioritized as more real than our sensible everyday life. The schematic anatomy of *heteronomous* self-theory is: complex-nonsymbolict+symbolic-desire-or-problem *within the context of* submission-to-a-higher-priority-more-real-entity *therefore* practical-activity-that-may-include-symbolic-activity *only within* the-limits-dictated-by-the-fetishized-entity(ies). To the extent that the resulting practical activity still manages to be satisfactory (satisfies the desire or solves the problem) its use is reinforced, despite its potentially disabling, self-alienating moment. But to the extent that the activity is unsatisfactory, only factors outside of belief in the fetishized, potentially disabling entity can be considered without generating high levels of discomfort and anxiety because one has now personally and existentially *identified* with the fetishized conceptual entity. Note that in this typical complex *heteronomous* self-theory schematic consideration of the nature and meaning of abstract concepts — like self, world and especially the fetishized abstract entity — now become of *central* importance. All that is involved is fundamentally still practical reason, but a practical reason that now includes complex self-alienating symbolic operations, through which one's implicit, embodied subjectivity is largely overridden by theoretical structures imposed (by oneself) from an outside perspective. Everything that was once relatively simple, has now been made highly complex, convoluted, and more difficult by the felt necessity to make an alien perspective the center of one's conceptual theory, which also means that to maintain the integrity of one's ideology, one will submit to the orders of those who successfully claim to represent and control that imagined center. Believers in ideologies have placed rings in their own noses, and have announced that they want to be led by those who have claimed the proper ideological authority to represent their self-alienated agency.

Primitive, ancient and modern slavery

It should at least seem curious, though not necessarily unexpected, that there is little or no research and investigation of the generally concomitant development of institutions of enslavement and civilizations. After all, the representatives (leaders, servants, lackeys, etc.) of civilized institutions have many reasons to hide the embarrassing fact that for the most part civilization has just been another word for societies employing slave labor (forced labor). Nor is there much significant research on the historical *continuities* of the various forms of enslaving institutions — especially when it comes to the transition from indentured, chattel, bond and related forms of slavery to the very *unfree* "free labor" and "democratic" institutions of the enlightened, modern age of wage, debt and prison slavery. Even among libertarians, who are often quick to attack the nation-state for its manifold crimes, there is most often a knee-jerk identification with the myths of civilization — in which it is always portrayed in glowing, ethereal terms, no matter how dismal and disgusting the facts on the ground *always are*. The fact that no civilization — now or historically — has ever existed without an *extensive* foundation built on dispossession, forced labor and plunder imposed upon the majority of its population is easily documentable, but rarely mentioned. This is because — as many do not, but all *should* know — it is never the job

of academic, religious or government scholars to point out that modern slavery not only exists but has enveloped the world more fully and intensively than any other forms of slavery in the past have done.

Evidence for slavery amongst the most primitive of peoples, undomesticated gatherers and hunters living in small bands, is rare to non-existent. If it can be said to exist at all it had to be unstable and fleeting, needing to be practiced by a small band without any further institutional means for its maintenance. The earliest forms of institutionalized slavery are not found until the Neolithic breakdown of the original free band societies (of gatherers and hunters) with the development of increasing animal and plant domestication, and ensuing sedentary living patterns under more and more hierarchical chiefdoms supported by religious ideologies. These conditions correspond to the development of the earliest forms of the state and civilization. Slavery in ancient civilizations eventually differentiated, as technologies and hierarchical social institutions became more variegated, allowing people to be controlled in new ways (physically and ideologically) while being forced to perform new types of labor. During this time the status of freedom and unfreedom also became increasingly differentiated, until just about everyone under the power of state systems (and increasingly even those tribal societies not yet completely swallowed up by them) became less than fully free in both ideological and hierarchical social practice, with the vast majority of people being forced into some degree of slavery — but most often under a euphemistic title. (See Winogrond, Joseph, "Slavery and Slack" parts 1 & 2 in *Modern Slavery* #2 & #3.) With the breakdown of the medieval civilizations, the onset of modernity made more and more of the old forms of slavery increasingly obsolete. With enclosures of commons, the progressive depopulation of the countryside, the acceleration of scientific understanding and growth of technological powers, the development of industrial scale commodity production and growth of trade and markets, and the intensification of ideological powers through increasing mass literacy and eventually schooling, mass media and other technologies of social control, wage slavery became the dominant form of forced labor in the modern world, and continues to grow to this day as the last frontiers of remaining communal self-sufficiency at the peripheries of enslaving civilizations are undermined, breached and overtaken.

Engendered resistance to slavery

But just because we can fairly and accurately construct world history since the end of the Paleolithic in terms of the proliferation of progressively more sophisticated institutions of enslavement, does not mean that the path has been without difficulties for the slavers. At each stage of the way people have resisted to the best of their abilities, granted that their abilities have also waned as their kinship bands, self-sufficient life ways, connections with the land, and non-ideological self-understandings have been undermined and destroyed. In the earlier stages of the civilizing enslavement of the planet the dominant response was open refusal through warfare, mutinies, insurrections, evasion and escape. But as the structures of slavery encircled the world and began to colonize every aspect of human life, the dominant forms of resistance had to increasingly come from within, since that is where most surviving humans now find themselves trapped. To be enslaved is to be humiliated, exploited and dominated. But even when enslaved people do their best to submit to enslavement, forget their predicament, and hide their suffering, there are always expressions — feelings and thoughts and acts of engendered resistance — that

sometimes extend to acts of refusal, rebellion or revolution. Even though the world may currently be enslaved, as long as human beings are still capable of living their own lives, resistance in one form or many forms will continue. And because slavery is comprised of a set of historical institutions, it *will* end.

Critical theory: The development of immanent critique

Most broadly, critical theory can be considered the theoretical moment of any and all forms of resistance to enslavement. From its beginnings, critical theory has had two defining moments: a goal of practical *autonomy* and a method of *immanent critique* (critique from within rather than from outside). The pre-history and history of self-organized resistance to heteronomous institutions of Slavery is largely unrecorded. This is because most early forms of self-organized resistance have been orally-based and not textually-based, simply as a reflection of the fact that inscribed symbolic systems were largely developed and primarily employed by participants in the institution and maintenance of slave systems until modern times. Therefore, the recorded history of *critique* (in the very broadest sense) largely begins with the questioning of religion *from within* these same circles by religious believers who were trained in the use of these symbolic systems. Historically, since religious texts (stories, poems, sayings) were among the first to describe formal doctrines, they were also among the first to both be criticized by — and include criticisms of — doctrinal rivals. In the west, *formal* critique in philosophy was eventually pioneered especially by the ancient Greeks and Romans, but otherwise elsewhere largely developed through the doctrinal disputes between and within religious factions of Judaism, Christianity and Islam. *Transcendental* arguments — criticisms from outside, arguments from external dogma or a claimed superior standpoint — were often the dominant form of traditional, theological criticism, as proponents of religious hierarchies and religious revelations fought between themselves to proclaim *the revealed Truth* against all uncivilized heretical or pagan deviations or rivals. However, within Christian doctrines themselves, the *immanent* divinity of the doctrine's man-god — God's son incarnated as man — was proclaimed within the larger transcendental division between humans and God. And the influence of this doctrinal *immanence within transcendence* eventually contributed throughout Europe to the increasingly successful rebellions of millenarian heretics and Protestant factions against the Roman church, based on forms of *immanent critique* made through direct interpretations of the Bible that dispensed with the Roman hierarchy.

Luther, Zwingli and Calvin, among the many other Protestant critics and millenarian heretics, remain the unacknowledged popularizers of immanent critique, which became the core method of all modern critical theories. Modern forms of immanent critique thus developed both within traditional Christianity[11] *and* within the critical thought of Enlightenment philosophers and the Romantics — many themselves heavily influenced by Protestant and millenarian themes. Self-consciously critical use of immanent critique can be found as early as both Jean-Jacques Rousseau's seminal *Second Discourse* (on inequality) and Immanuel Kant's critical philosophy of

[11] Minor forms of immanent critique have also originated and developed within other religions and philosophies worldwide, even including *within* the Roman Church itself. Consider, for example, the limited, but longstanding, Franciscan currents and — more recently — the Catholic Worker Movement, as well as Liberation Theology, to large degrees operating within the formal bounds of the Catholic hierarchy. There are also many well-established traditions of immanence in Eastern religion and philosophy (where it is often harder to locate where religion ends and philosophy begins than it is in the West) that have lent themselves to varying practices of immanent critique.

enlightenment, although Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel is often given the greatest credit for its explicitly modern development.

However, the convoluted Hegelian dialectical synthesis of history and metaphysics — developed through the phenomenological immanent critique in his *Phenomenology of Spirit* — was soon in turn deconstructed through the immanent critiques mounted by the post-Hegelians, who argued that Hegel's "Spirit" (with its ambiguous relation to Christianity) constituted a hypostatization or reification of the true, self-creating subject-object of history. David Friedrich Strauss and Ludwig Feuerbach contributed post-Hegelian immanent (anthropological) critiques of Christianity, arguing that the human species, not God, is the hidden subject-object of all religion. Bruno Bauer turned from his defense of the Hegelian rationalist interpretation of Christianity against David Strauss, to an explicitly atheistic reading of Hegel, and finally to an ultra-Hegelian philosophy of Pure Criticism. And Max Stirner simply dissolved metaphysics and philosophy in their entirety through an immanent critique of Hegel, Feuerbach and Bauer, which pointed out that (the non-conceptual, actually-lived) *I* am the only one who can ultimately be the *creator* of my thoughts for myself in my world, neither God nor humanity, nor any other abstract conception or object can ever be that concrete, living creator.

It was after this point, during the buildup to the 1848 revolutions and subsequent reactions, that Karl Marx largely completed his own contribution to *critical* philosophy begun in his early writings (including "On the Jewish Question" and the "Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts") by authoring the *The German Ideology* with Friedrich Engels, before abandoning philosophical discourse for political economy when they failed in their efforts to get their nearly unreadable manuscript published. The Marxist version of immanent critique argues, similarly to Feuerbach's anthropological materialism, that the human species is the true subject-object of history, but in a more radically *historical*-materialist manner emphasizing class divisions. Despite the fact that *The German Ideology* didn't appear in full until well into the 20th century, Marx's philosophical writings (along with his political economic writings) became the bases for Georg Lukács' phenomenological Marxism, Karl Mannheim's sociology of knowledge, and the Frankfurt School's own incarnation of "critical theory" (most notably formulated by Max Horkheimer, Theodor Adorno, Erich Fromm, Walter Benjamin, Herbert Marcuse, and Jürgen Habermas). During and since this time, *critical* theory has become synonymous with an ever widening range of particular critiques of alienation and domination. By the late 20th century these critiques expanded especially into identity studies (race, gender, etc.), cultural studies, environmental studies and post-structuralism, including post-Marxism.

Critical theory: Reclaiming autonomy

Modern *critical* theory began largely as an Enlightenment project of reclaiming personal autonomy on the heels of the Protestant Reformation, the beginnings of mass literacy, the scientific revolution and the industrial revolution. It championed critique of traditional religion (primarily that of the Christianity of the Roman church) and the medieval social forms (monarchical feudalism) within which it was embedded. As the Enlightenment progressed and its contradictions became more visible, *critical* theorists turned increasingly towards self-reflection, self-criticism and social criticism. With the earth-shaking (though mixed) successes of the English, American and, especially, French and Haitian revolutions in destroying many pillars of the old order and

beginning the consolidation of a new capitalist order of nation-states, *critical* theory became increasingly identified with the rise in consciousness of those excluded from power in the modern regimes. Initially this focus was especially on the various strata of workers. Of most often secondary — but later increasing — importance were the status of women and children, religious minorities (most importantly Jews early on), non-dominant ethnic groups (especially where codified by differing skin colors), cultural minorities (including minority forms of diet and sexual expression) and those resisting or refusing capitalist industrialization and the nation-state on a wide range of levels. What all varieties of *critical* theory share is a commitment to some form of *autonomy* (refusal of enslavement) coupled with an attempt at *immanent critique* of religion, philosophy and other forms of ideology that can help ground practical resistance to varying conceptions of alienation and institutional domination — although many recent forms of critical theory have been retreating toward relatively pessimistic and increasingly impotent ironic or nihilistic positions.

The commitment to autonomous or self-conscious activity was most famously formulated by Immanuel Kant in "An answer to the question: What is Enlightenment?" (1784) There Kant argued that enlightenment meant overcoming immaturity by using "one's own understanding without the guidance of another." According to Kant autonomy is following laws that one agrees to give oneself according only to the dictates of (universal) Reason, since for Kant every other source of law is "heteronomous." For Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, historicizing Kant's perspective, subjective autonomy must be situated and actualized only through the process of identifying with the (rational) substance of one's developing social totality. For Ludwig Feuerbach, criticizing Hegel from a perspective of a sensuously materialist humanism (on his way to naturalism), autonomy is the human individual as constituting species-being. While for Bruno Bauer it is only the critical critic, who has integrated his particular interests into the historically developing rational universality who is truly autonomous. And for Karl Marx any genuine autonomy under capitalism is relegated only to species-being divided into class organizations or, alternatively, to abstract individuals expressing their roles as class-conscious species-beings. Actual flesh-and-blood human beings conscious of their own lives and relationships while expressing ideas, values and goals of their own need not apply. According to Marxist dogma they are merely abstractions, because they don't acknowledge their properly assigned places in the historical unfolding of dialectical Reason! (The only exceptions for actually-existing human beings are for those in the drivers' seats of class ideologies and organizations, since they're not mere abstractions, unlike all the rest of us.)

Heteronomous *critical* theory

Heteronomous *critical* theory is *critical* theory in the service of heteronomous "autonomy" — or in the service of heteronomous agency dressed in symbolically "autonomous" clothes. The defining difference between genuinely critical *self*-theory and everything else that has traditionally gone by the name of "critical theory" consists in the unyieldingly persistent assertion of *actually-lived autonomy* and refusal of submission to *any* form of heteronomy — any form of determination by external imposition — within critical *self*-theory. All other (heteronomous) critical theory asserts forms of *merely supposed* autonomy that are actually heteronomous substitutes for my *actual* autonomy, your *actual* autonomy and our *actual* autonomy. And these

ersatz, reified forms of autonomy are then employed in recuperative, short-circuited forms of immanent critique, which deny actually-lived autonomy in favor of self-alienated forms meant to serve real or imagined heteronomous agents. All critical theory that is not consistently critical *self*-theory then consists in critiques of particular forms of enslavement merely in order to substitute other forms of enslavement rather than to *abolish all enslavement*. This is a lesson we should already have learned from religious conflicts, where the object is never to reclaim our actually-lived autonomy, but to substitute one form of religious self-alienation for another. Ultimately, just as all religions are forms of heteronomous theory, all recuperative critical theories are also forms of heteronomous theory. But whereas traditional religions and premodern theories are usually oriented towards the defense of earlier forms of enslavement, heteronomous critical theories are always oriented towards the defense of forms of *modern* slavery, and most often towards supposedly ever "freer," more "progressive," forms of modern slavery. This means that nearly every heteronomous critical theory is connected — either implicitly or explicitly — to leftist political-economic theories based in the liberal tradition of the French Revolution. There the formal differences of capitalist liberalism were institutionalized in the seating arrangements of the National Assembly, where those supporting traditional, monarchical-feudal forms of order sat on the right side of the speaker and those advocating radically reformist measures sat on the left.

At least since the French Revolution, just about every form of critical theory includes assertions by its authors of the importance and value of at least some degree of autonomy. Especially since Immanuel Kant's critical philosophy, a degree of autonomy has generally been seen as requisite for the exercise of theoretical and practical reason. But, at the same time, within any and every critical tradition of religious, philosophical and socio-political ideology this degree of autonomy has also been highly circumscribed or eliminated in actual doctrines and their practices, whether this is acknowledged or obscured. Even when it is not made explicit within critical traditions of theory that there are unquestionable commands to which one must submit and dogmatic boundaries beyond which one is not allowed to think and act, these commands and these boundaries to thought and action remain in force, and the moment the partisans of a particular ideology gain any degree of social, political, economic or military power their support for modern slavery is revealed according to the methods with which they participate in or direct the management of forced labor, resource rationing and ideological discipline to maintain one or another form of capitalist, wage-slave regime in power.

Immanuel Kant's own commitment to autonomy and maturity extended primarily to the critique of only the most obviously irrational forms of religious, metaphysical and moral belief, while demanding *voluntary submission* to moral and political laws — justified through a metaphysical, reified conception of Reason — and thus to the rationalized power of those using laws to enslave themselves and others. This failure to follow through by advocating autonomy (and maturity) for everyone at every level and in every aspect of life *for themselves* continues to haunt all forms of heteronomous critical theory, where complete, self-creative autonomy is *aways* hedged through a number of strategies for a wide variety of reasons. Ultimately these reasons are all related to concomitant failures in critical practice that attempt to shield one or another form of self-alienation from self-consciousness and self-critique, thus allowing for manipulation by ideologues who understand how to harness this self-alienation to the institutions of modern slavery — and also how to exploit it to their own profit.

In fact, since heteronomous theories of every type basically function as confidence games, they are often even more effective largely operating at more implicit levels under the threshold of conscious awareness. Either way, whether experienced as explicit or implicit, the commands and boundaries are always enforced zealously by all the "progressive" institutions of modern slavery — with any necessary tactic and tool for ensuring compliance and disciplining deviance. The vehemence with which any serious deviance from heteronomous critical theory is met can often surprise those who naively take their first forbidden, autonomous step in defiance of enslaving institutions. Where logical argument is inadequate (almost always, since the logic of personal autonomy is ultimately not on the side of slavery, not even for the most "progressive" forms of slavery), any and every form of fallacious argument or *ad hominem* attack may be employed without embarrassment or acknowledgement of its invalidity. The point will be to bully or beat the heretic into submission or to discredit the heretic through the sheer weight of an avalanche of fallacious reasoning and personal attacks, each often mixed with tons of dirt and mud. When necessary heretics are physically silenced, tortured, imprisoned, assassinated or massacred in the fine tradition of enlightened, civilized "argument" (that is, they are only punished "for their own good" and for "the good of society," etc., or for any other allowable heteronomous rationales). This will nearly always have the salutary effect of further discrediting the heretic's obviously erroneous and overly enthusiastic championing of her or his own theoretical autonomy — and concomitant refusal of heteronomous (critical) theory — in the eyes of most witnesses. When the powers of (un)reason and (il)logic are not enough, the power of violence always remains the final solution. There we initially find the inquisitions, penal colonies, torture chambers, gulags, psychiatric wards and re-education camps, backed by police, secret police, institutions of mass-surveillance, and all the tools of militarized violence — mass murder and terror through bullets, bombs, poisons, starvation and death camps.

Critical theory: Marxist social theory

Marxist ideologies have constituted a wide range of the most dominant and successful forms of heteronomous critical theory. Karl Marx (along with his sidekick and funder Friedrich Engels) managed to construct a theoretical system claiming the best of multiple worlds that thereby appealed to several distinct groups, from working-class activists and liberal reformists to displaced intellectuals and would-be bureaucrats of socialism. Even a large number of pro-revolutionary radicals have attempted to employ Marxist means in multiple countries over the last century and a half. The primary promise of Marxist ideology has been the completion and fulfillment of the supposedly implicit goals of the bourgeois revolutions — in the case of the French Revolution, for example, the goals of liberty, equality and fraternity — through the progressive, capitalist development of the productive forces of the economy. Onto this was grafted a secondary theme of the realization of a relatively undefined — but rationalized — utopian communism that would supposedly coincide with or immediately follow the realization of bourgeois capitalist technological development, allowing mature capitalism to then be consciously redirected to progressive human social development. Best of all for displaced intellectuals, Marxism provided the rationale for intellectual direction of working class organizations and parties, since deployment of the dialectical Hegelian philosophical categories of historical materialism (to "realize" philosophy or Reason in society or history) translated into the (pseudo-) scientific language of a simultaneously

realist and utopian political-economic doctrine would be a bit much for your average, everyday non-intellectual to be expected to understand or master.

Marxist ideologies have historically tended to crystallize around three axes of orientation: parliamentary multi-party-state social democracy (Kautsky), single-party-state social democracy (Leninism, Trotskyism, Maoism), and all of the forms of council-communist social democracy (Luxemburg, Pannekoek, Korsch). Empirically, ideologies around the first axis have been the most successful in supporting full development of the bourgeois capitalist forces of production in the central imperialist nation-states of Western Europe, while those of the second axis have been most successful in developing the capitalist forces of production (instead of the bourgeoisie) in the less economically developed nation-states, especially in Asia, Eastern Europe and Africa. Ideologies of the third axis have been relatively unsuccessful in supporting *or* developing the bourgeois capitalist forces of production anywhere due to their larger commitments to the secondary (utopian) theme of Marxism as both means and end. They have generally been better at disrupting bourgeois capitalist development than at supporting it, as would be expected due to their tendency to prioritize the realization of a rationalized utopian system of production over the progressive development of bourgeois capitalist productive forces. When examined we see that even council communist forms of social democracy retain essential Marxist ideological categories and goals. But, whereas the squalid histories of Marxist social democracy in multi-party-states and the catastrophic histories of Marxist social democracy in totalitarian one-party-states has long been rather obvious, any remaining rationalist-utopian hopes embodied in Marxism are now uneasily sustained in council-communist ideologies where disillusionment with their recuperative practices has never (yet) had time to fully develop due to their rather fleeting episodes of political-economic realization.

It was in the years following the successful coup d'état of the Bolsheviks over the socialist Provisional Government followed by its takeover of the councils (Soviets) in Russia, and following the defeat of German council communist tendencies by an alliance of the much larger Social Democratic Party (SPD) with the military in Germany, that the Institute for Social Research (ISR, better known in the US as the Frankfurt School) was founded. Despite the clear and consistent emancipatory failures (mostly disasters) of Marxist ideologies in every instance they had attained political power, the Frankfurt School was devoted to an independent program of interdisciplinary academic Marxist research in support of the various Marxist political tendencies. However, with the change of the Institute's directorship from Carl Grünberg to Max Horkheimer in 1930, Grünberg's emphasis on productivist Marxism was replaced with Horkheimer's emphasis on what he called "Critical Theory" in a successful attempt to distance the Institute from Marxist orthodoxies, while opening it up to new influences: Weberian sociology, Husserlian phenomenology, Freudian psychoanalysis, along with re-encounters with Kant's critical philosophy and Hegel's dialectical idealism. However, once again (as with the council communists), the essential Marxist ideological categories and goals were largely retained, leading since to ever more convoluted defenses of the foundational dogmas in order to preserve them (and the self-alienation they require) relatively unchanged. Centrally, for the Frankfurt School critical theorists, this has meant retaining the primacy of the fetishized metaphysical Hegelian collective subjectivity in one "materialist" ideal form or another, along with the requisite reified forms of social Reason. However, as the fundamental Marxist categories and goals of the Frankfurt School theorists became more and more detached from any actually-existing reified (collective) intersubjectivities in the real world they progressively retreated towards impotent social-philosophical speculation — nearly wholly

transcendent of the immanent present by the end of Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno's careers. As Martin Jay notes in *The Dialectical Imagination*, his history of the Institute for Social Research, "Horkheimer and the other [Frankfurt School members] were never willing to … [unmask] Marxism as just one more ideology among others." (p. 63) Traditional Marxist ideologies may be kept alive largely on academic life-support these days, but a few zombies still attempt to embody their dogmas. The progressive irrelevance of the Frankfurt School is now represented mainly by Jürgen Habermas' dreary philosophy of communicative rationality (locating a reified reason in structures of reified interpersonal communication) and Axel Honneth's incoherent and highly reified philosophy of recognition.

Postmodern critical theory: Structuralist and post-structuralist ideologies

With the contemporary exhaustion of traditional Marxist ideologies and stagnation of Frankfurt School critical theories, postmodern critical theories have progressively claimed center stage in the recuperative arena. Instead of the line from Kant to Hegel through Feuerbach to Marx and the Frankfurt School, postmodern critical theorists have tended to take a number of lines from Kant and Hegel through Schopenhauer to Nietzsche, or then through Darwin and Brentano to Freud, or through Brentano and Husserl to Heidegger, or often various combinations of any or all of these with or without encounters with strands of Marxist critical theory (as in the post-Marxisms). A central influence shared to some degree by theorists following most of these lines has been a historical movement through structuralism to post-structuralism. Structuralists — like Saussure, Lévi-Strauss, Piaget, Althusser, Barthes, Lacan and Foucault — attempted to explain human socio-cultural life in terms of occultly abstract structures — often supposed linguistic structures — that are neither material nor ideal. While post-structuralists — like Althusser, Barthes, Baudrillard, Lacan, Deleuze, Derrida, Butler and Foucault (obviously including many former structuralists) — increasingly questioned certain aspects of structuralist dogmas and reifications, especially the exclusionary, ahistorical, asocial and/or non-embodied nature of many structuralist theories. The large number of directions taken by postmodern or post-structuralist critical theories makes any unitary characterization of their underlying similarities difficult. But they most often share one or another form of reactive critique of structural determinations that still preserves those determinations, merely in some sort of modified, more fluid ways. The glaring excesses of the structuralist reduction of human life to determination by abstract structures has given way to various earnest (or occasionally playful) partial critiques of structure that are often comparable to negative theologies in that they chip away from the outside by describing what *isn't* the case in attempts to indirectly reveal what might still be left. The most widely influential post-structuralist stances belong to Jacques Derrida's deconstruction and Michel Foucault's archeological/genealogical projects.

Deconstruction can be understood as relentless critique presupposing that (*reified*) language (or *reified* representational) structures — at least *mediate*, but in Derrida's archetypal version — *create* all meanings. (No consideration is given by Derrida that *non*reified language use can ever exist.) Deconstruction thus functions as a more radical or self-critical version of Heidegger's *ontological* understanding that "language speaks" ("Die Sprache spricht.") Within this reified understanding, we don't create linguistic conceptions, linguistic conceptions create our cultural

world, which then appears trapped within a predetermined linguistic web of reified meanings that construct our lives. The best we can do is to maintain a critical stance towards and refuse any possibility of "presence" (without "absence"), any possibility of life prior to an ontological mediation of language. Deconstruction represents the recursive nightmare of a self-alienated, "…rationalist mirror-world [where] Truth, Value and Reality are all representations rather than lived activities themselves."[12]

Foucault's archeology and genealogies similarly presuppose that "epistemic structures" or "historical *a prioris*" or "grounds of truth and falsehood" (or "problematizations") can be uncovered that (autonomously or through "power/knowledge" or "practice") historically determine or construct empirical subjectivity and objectivity, although Foucault always seemed to leave at least some tiny bit of wiggle room for the possibilities of personal power (as "resistance" to power) as he analyzed and criticized "regimes of practice" (institutions, ideologies, etc.). In his own academic-practical regime Foucault provided semi-critical histories of madness and the clinic, a somewhat brilliant though aporetic structuralist account of the historical stages of (*reified*) knowledge in Europe since 1600 (in *The Order of Things*),[13] and histories/critiques of modern forms of discipline and punishment, and of ancient and modern sexualities (as modes of self-production). But he made it clear that he was neither ready nor willing to leave philosophy and ideology behind, ultimately reproducing somewhat more interesting and convoluted arguments that remain trapped within the boundaries of reified thought with only self-contradictory hints of any possible way out.

Postmodern critical theories thus generally defend anti-humanist (structuralist/post-structuralist) forms of autonomy supposedly revealed through their fragmentary, multi-directional, immanent critiques of structural bases. But these forms of autonomy are never my autonomy, your autonomy or our autonomy. They are tortuously abstract conceptions from impossibly-other *imagined* perspectives, constructed through the never-ending interplay of structures and critiques. They are all thus reified, heteronomous forms of critical theory — consciously remaining within the symbolic realm of philosophy or religion, and thus of ideology. In fact many claim it is impossible to ever leave this realm, despite the fact that most

[12] See my "Clarifying the Unique and Its Self-Creation" in Wolfi Landstreicher's translation of *Stirner's Critics*, p. 17, note 17 for an account of the "recursive nightmare" of rationalist reification. Derrida's silly, basically delusional, insistence that metaphysics is inescapable — because even the nonconceptual is a *conceptual determination*, overlooks the slight problem that when anyone besides a religious, philosophical or ideological fanatic speaks of the nonconceptual the referent is less a determined concept than the actual life we *live*. For Derrida the function of reification is merely assumed to be universal, ubiquitous and compulsory, and any attempt to exit from the structures of reified communication are dismissed (unself-critically) as impossible in advance. Some of Derrida's most fundamental philosophical critiques are aimed at Husserl, Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological philosophies. He sees them as each making progressively more complete, but always necessarily incomplete critiques of the self-alienations implicit in the construction of Kant's transcendental subjectivity. But his critiques do not touch the nonconceptual of critical self-theory, nor of Stirner's *Einzige* (Unique), because these lie entirely outside of metaphysics and philosophy. As Stirner notes, all conceptual development is impossible with the *Einzige* because it is a completely nominal, "empty concept." Stirner points out in his major work that: "Your thinking has for a presupposition not 'thinking,' but you. But thus you do presuppose yourself after all? Yes, but not for myself, but for my thinking. Before my thinking, there is — I. From this it follows that my thinking is not preceded by a thought, or that my thinking is without a 'presupposition.' For the presupposition which I am for my thinking is not one made by thinking, not one thought of, but it is posited thinking itself, it is the owner of the thought, and proves only that thinking is nothing more than — property, that an 'independent' thinking, a 'thinking spirit,' does not exist at all." (*The Unique and Its Own*)

[13] In *The Archaeology of Knowledge* Foucault admits to "avoiding the ground on which [his discourse] could find support." (p. 226)

also claim that this realm is not and cannot be ahistorical, making it hard to explain how an historically-constructed realm can develop that, once constituted or entered, suddenly has no possible exit!

Ideological critiques of ideology: Recuperation through *critical* ideologies

In a world of near-universal slavery anything but genuinely autonomous, self-directed activity is expected. And this expectation will invariably be expressed in any and every institutionally tolerated form of thought. This includes every tolerated form of critical thought. To be tolerated each form of critical theory must pledge allegiance at the least to the need for universal enslavement (though rarely in such explicit language — both modern slavers *and* slaves definitely prefer euphemisms). Each form of heteronomous critical theory must include dire warnings against deviating from any path that doesn't obsequiously quaver before the proper universal (or universally anti-universal) abstractions embodied by absolutely necessary hierarchical, bureaucratic institutions. (This goes even for too many self-described anarchists, who cannot conceive of the supposedly-desired absence of the state without also proclaiming the absolute necessity of bureaucratic, [self-]governing bodies to ensure human submission to the needs of society, particular social classes, a socialist economy, political democracy and/or other unquestionably "necessary" abstractions employed to conceal their underlying hierarchical, institutional assumptions.) Each form of tolerated thought, critical or not, must demonstrate a commitment to universal slavery by expressing identification with it in one or another predictable form. Most of these forms of identification with universal (or universally dispersed) slavery — in these modern (or post-modern), enlightened times — will themselves be characterized as modes of freedom, self-realization, self-determination, or other highly deceptive conceptions. Let's face it, slavery itself is a hard sell. But slavery dolled up in the modern guise of freedom, self-realization or self-determination — no matter how unbelievably (consider "the commune" or "communization," "*différance*," "ecological democracy," "body without organs," etc.) — will nearly always be more attractive to the average gull preferring a "50%-off Sale" price to the same price offered without a "Sale!"

The only intolerable form of critical theory (for every theologist, philosopher, ideologist and any other consciousness cop) is critical self-theory — theory which implacably proposes my, your or our perspective, and thus refuses any form of enslavement and cannot be recuperated without transformation into heteronomous self-theory.

The typically illogical critiques of any attempts at genuinely non-ideological self-theory usually include a redefinition of the individual human being as necessarily isolated and/or unnaturally autonomous or self-sufficient (somehow unaffected by natural objects, other humans, etc.) in order to then claim that the individual human being *of the non-ideological self-theory* is an "abstraction," while ignoring the fact that it is the *ideological critic* of non-ideological self-theory who has created the reified definition that is then castigated!

Slave theory: Religion, philosophy and ideology

We live in a shared social world in which slavery (systematic relations of domination and submission) is a taken-for-granted fact of life that is enforced and reinforced at every turn in every

institution of modern civilization. But in modern everyday discourse Slavery has become invisible, except as a marginalized concept applicable only to the very worst instances of enslavement in other times, other places or the furthest reaches of today's criminal underworld. The deliberate and pervasive construction of the invisibility of modern slavery in everyday life has proven the most effective and enduring strategy for maintaining the existence of enslaving institutions to the extent that it defines the modern social era. It is now nearly impossible to find defenders of slavery beyond the more disconcertingly honest of religious, philosophical or ideological fanatics. The world of religious fanaticism (those willing to vow complete submission and enslavement to gods as the highest form of virtue), philosophical fanaticism (those proclaiming their absolute submission to the laws of Reason and Morality), and ideological fanaticism (those proclaiming suicidally murderous devotion to parties or nation-states) is increasingly alien to the spirit of the modern age. The world of explicitly *savish* fanaticism remains a more and more incomprehensible relic of the premodern and early modern ages. In the enlightened, fully modern (or postmodern) age everyone wants to be "free." But freedom is a very slippery and highly contextual concept (consider the opening epigraph to this essay). Thus "freedom" makes a perfect disguise for any and all forms of enslavement — a perfect means for hiding or minimizing the existence of fundamentally enslaving political, economic and ideological systems, by portraying them as "free" in particular arrays of non-fundamental, relatively superficial, contexts. But the nearly-ubiquitous success of this strategy always depends directly upon an underlying, unspoken, but continuous agreement that each person must identify implicitly and unquestionably with the ultimate necessity for his or her dependency and enslavement. Wherever and whenever it happens, the absence of such agreement — and, especially, its flaunting — places the entire modern system of slave discipline in question. Therefore it is plain to every loyal functionary within the institutions of modern slavery that this is *the* most crucial of social taboos to uphold. And each modern slave — each individual person who implicitly, unspokenly and continuously identifies as a slave (a "citizen," a "free woman" or "free man" *under the law*, etc.) within the institutions of modern civilization — also understands the necessity for defending this taboo from any challenges, although most often as a function of the passive aggression of their resentment at anyone not playing by the same rules of submission they feel they have been forced into, rather than as a result of their total identification with their ideological and institutional masters.

"Slave theory" is another name for heteronomous theories, but putting the emphasis on their underlying, common social/institutional function *along with* the displacement of autonomy emphasized by the "heteronomous" label. Slave theories, however central or peripheral, simple or complex, coherent or incoherent, all serve to displace lived (subjective/objective) autonomy, and do so by attributing it instead to some abstract, imagined subjectivity. Slave theory includes every religion that claims any transcendent spirit(s), god(s) or planes of existence that are supposed to be completely beyond any human experience (or whose existence in our life-world amounts to no more than wishful thinking or pure fiction). Slave theory includes all of philosophy, if philosophy is defined as the pursuit of absolute or transcendent Ground, Truth, Value, Being, Subjectivity,

[14] The liberal reformist critics of attenuated, narrowly-conceived versions of "modern slavery" act as collaborators whose complicity serves to minimize and hide the forms of enslavement now actually dominant in the 21st century. They collaborate by attempting to reduce the meanings of slavery to cover only a tiny fraction of particularly egregious criminal practices, in return for funding and support from foundations, corporations and governments which themselves rely on the maintenance and reproduction of these dominant, but relatively invisibilized, forms of slavery in large part for their *own* existence.

Number or Concepts. And slave theory includes every other form of ideology, in which theory is constructed around any form of imagined subjectivity that is intended to displace anyone's actually-lived self-theory, as in any form of modern liberalism including all types of Marxism, all types of radical or reformist environmentalism, all types of identity politics, etc.[14]

Ultimately, every form of ideology or heteronomous thought *is* self-alienation in the realm of conceptual thought, and this conceptual self-alienation is a reflection in theory of the self-alienation that is a predictable result of every institutional practice of modern slavery in a world of slaves and commodities — and their respective prices. However, this self-alienation is not the reified, abstract alienation of theology, philosophy or social ideologies, in which a reified subjectivity is conceived as being alienated from some sort of larger, more objective abstraction like god or spirit, society, species-being, reason, etc. It is simply the *self*-alienation involved in each person choosing to refuse responsibility for his or her life-activities and to instead carve out some tiny area of privately-claimed — but relatively impotent — subjectivity, while submitting to (and thus attributing his or her actions to) one or many outside, occult force(s).[15]

This self-alienation essential to every ideology, requires the (self-)creation of some sort of central conceptual gap, split, rupture, dehiscence or dualism between one's reified subjectivity (or tiny self) and the portion of one's life and acts one disowns in order to submit to. Absent an absolute need expressed for submission to an abstract enslaving master, ideologies are simply illogical and nonsensical. But given the overarching desperation inherent in existential submission, this illogic becomes the central logic of all conceptual life — and in a world of near-universal modern slavery it becomes the central logic of all social life. Given the social unanimity required to maintain the illusion that modern slavery is sane and rational and should remain invisible at all times, it should then not be in the least surprising that any violations of this institutionally-enforced unanimity will meet with suppression or censorship whenever possible, or wild misrepresentations and denunciations when necessary. Therefore it should be understood that for all ideologists, including philosophers and theologists of whatever denomination, critical self-theory (or in some cases, even of self-theory!) will be seen as completely impossible or unspeakable, and if it *were* (not that it ever really *could be*) possible, then it would be pure egoism, and thus an unmitigated evil that would have to be crushed.

This self-alienation must always include a refusal of responsibility, a refusal to mature and grow up, and a refusal of identity with one's whole self/world. Responsibility is then redefined as the necessity for submission (to law, society, nature, morality, or to one's god or master), rather than the ability to respond as an autonomous being in whatever manner one deems appropriate in any relationship into which one might enter. The refusal of maturity (of the autonomous refusal of heteronomy) is then redefined as the absolutely-necessary submission required for anyone to attain true maturity under god, under law, or under any other imagined master. And the refusal to identify oneself conceptually with one's entire life/world is redefined as realism, as the acknowledgement that humans are by nature divided, crippled or suffering beings.

[15] I call this pervasive style of self-conception the "tiny self" theory. It is the standard-issue theory of the self required for any ideological form of thought and practice. The non-reified, anti-ideological style of self-conception found in critical self-theories involves, on the contrary, an identity of self and world, or of subjectivity and objectivity, each of which poles are by themselves always abstractions. It is only my self as my entire world that I care about, just as it is only my subjectivity to the extent that 'tis embodied and intertwined within my world that actually exists for me. It is the duty of ideological thinking to continually claim the impossibility of anything but *tiny* selves, and the necessity of something inextricably cut off from oneself that must be the *real center* of one's world.

And, finally, this self-alienation leads to the schizoid passive-aggressive, repetitive-compulsive, sadomasochistic, idealistic-narcissistic styles dominant within and shared by all contemporary ideologies. Each of these ideological styles may emphasize one or another of these moments above others, but all share each of them to a significant degree. This is because all ideologies share the same basic anatomy of self-alienation, and this self-alienation can be analyzed phenomenally in the same basic patterns involving unquestioned submission to and identification with the idealized slave-master in order to share in the expression of the master's powers, the refusal to exercise one's own autonomy and responsibility by projecting this autonomy and responsibility onto the idealized master — which then allows one to act without guilt in attacking, torturing, plundering and murdering any infidels, heretics, enemies or egoists as long as it is done according to the will or law of the idealized slave-master. This is the dominant pattern of life under modern slavery.

The *reversal* of perspective: From self-alienating heteronomy to lived autonomy

Radically *reversing* perspective returns an inside-out, heteronomously-constructed world to its one and only actually-lived perspective: *my* perspective for me, *your* perspective for you and each of *our own particular, inalienable* perspectives for each and all of us. Instead of working against ourselves in attempts to see and understand the world through the eyes of slave masters (through God's, Reason's, Society's, the Economy's or the Nation-State's perspective, etc.) as if we ourselves really only exist as their objects, critical self-theory involves a complete and permanent reversal of perspective through which we consistently refuse to believe that we are primarily the objects of others rather than self-creators responsible for our own lives, choices and actions — living with other self-creators who *with us* can refuse, resist and together hold the key to abolishing the worldwide hegemony of modern slavery.

This world-shaking reversal of perspective reduces Immanuel Kant's "Copernican turn" (his philosophical turn to examining empirical subjectivity to reveal the transcendental conditions of knowledge) to a relatively minor status in the history of philosophical slave theory. And it does this for each of us the moment we take it up for ourselves, with a clarity and power that have to be directly experienced to be appreciated at all. To understand what is at stake, Kant's "Copernican turn" in philosophy needs to be briefly reconsidered and compared to critical self-theory's much more radical *reversal* of perspective. Kant portrayed his turn or revolution in *philosophical perspective* as analogous to the supplanting of the Ptolemaic account of the traditionally *geocentric* (stationary Earth-centered) universe by the new *heliocentric* (sun-centered, Earth moving) account "discovered" by Copernicus in the 16th century (*new* in the sense that it was systematically defended in a newly more convincing manner than heliocentric models of the previous two thousand years had been). In this Copernican turn, Kant rejected the possibilities of the speculative metaphysics of his time, all the forms of "pure reason" — of idealism, realism, and materialism then current — as presupposing forms of knowledge not possibly available to us, leaving us instead with assurance of only empirical subjectivity (especially since Descartes' *cogito* and Hume's skeptical empiricism) and what we can possibly know from the perspective of this subjectivity. According to Kant we can never possibly know the *thing-in-itself*, because this necessarily remains hidden on the other side of our experience — inaccessible to our point-of-

view. What we *can* discover in our experience, though, are the transcendental "pure reason" or *a priori* conditions of knowing that Kant considered necessary for us conceive of ourselves and our world at all. The great bulk of all the modern and postmodern philosophical efforts since Kant 5 has been built on the immanent metaphysics of these Kantian transcendental presuppositions, or else to a large degree in response to them — and/or in response to those so influenced like Fichte, Schelling, Schopenhauer Hegel, Kierkegaard, Dilthey, Nietzsche, Husserl, Sartre and all the rest.

This is also true to a significant degree for critical self-theory, although critical self-theory grows far more out of preconceptual life-experiences and what remain of oral cultural forms, than from the formal conceptual critique of philosophical literature. Indeed, critical self-theory is *not* philosophy (under any of its most commonly-accepted definitions). And the reason it remains outside of philosophy is its complete reversal of perspective from all ideology, a reversal of perspective that can, however, also be at least partially illustrated in relation to Kant's analogy of the Copernican turn from Ptolemaic astronomy. The most interesting aspect of the Copernican turn for critical self-theorists is that neither Ptolemy nor Copernicus nor any of their followers ever provide any real evidence for an absolute, metaphysical center of movement. Whether the Earth is still or the Earth moves, whether the Sun and the planets are still or move, or whether they all move are not questions that can be indisputably answered. There can only be relative answers — relative to perspectives, actual or imagined. But none of these perspectives can possibly have any ultimate claim on me aside from my own lived perspective, since I am indisputably the center of my own world and my own world is all that ever does or can exist for me (just as, by analogy, I understand that your own world is all that can ever exist for you). The Ptolemaic or Copernican theories of astronomical movement are each of only *practical* interest to me. I can use either of them (treating their geocentric or heliocentric perspectives as imaginary), or any other theories, as I please for my own purposes and it is all the same to me if they each prove equally effective. The only differences between theories that matter to me are practical, and any significant practical differences can always be proven *empirically* — that, is proven in *my own life-experience*. Similarly, when I turn to understanding myself in my world, I am interested in only the practical effects (for my world) of this empirical knowledge, not in any alleged purely rational or transcendental laws (beyond any empirical verification, beyond myself and my world) that are supposed to tell me what I can and can't do (which, instead I can always discover empirically for myself). Kant's transcendental, theoretical or pure reason and his morality are merely (self-)deceptive forms of practical reasoning whose common purpose is self-alienation.[16] In them Kant and all of his subsequent followers and critics are always more interested in providing tortuously obfuscatory justifications for the imagined external determinants of their life-experience,

[16] As even Kant himself has noted, "pure reason" in its theoretical and Practical manifestations only differs from purely practical understanding in its much wider and deeper free play of abstraction and imagination. It is "a single reason in different relations." (Lewis White Beck, *A Commentary on Kant's Critique of Practical Reason*, p. 50) Although for Kant this wider and deeper reach includes an (imaginary) "transcendental," "pure practical reason" of "unconditioned conditions for voluntary action." (Beck, p. 41) It is this wider and deeper free play of abstraction and imagination that make theoretical reason so easily susceptible to unself-critical reification, and thus also so susceptible to wishful thinking of all kinds, as in religion, (Kantian and every other form of) metaphysics, morality and social ideologies. Ultimately, all forms of reason can be understood as forms of practical reason as soon as we refuse every impossible attempt to prove that we can (in actuality and not just in pure imagination) reason about that which we cannot ever experience. For critical self-theorists, then, theoretical, moral and aesthetic reason are just particular modes or aspects of practical reason, and this is easily understood to be the result of reason itself (in all its manifestations) being constituted through its abstraction from our life-activity as a whole.

which in Kantian theory are imposed by supposedly pre-existing, timeless, purely rational forms to which any given human experience must conform. But any such external (transcendental, *a priori*) determinants are never more than *imagined* determinants, unless they themselves are part of our empirical, phenomenal life-experience. Kant was never able to apply his (really mostly Hume's) astute criticisms of the baseless fantasies of other people's "pure reason" to the fantasies of his own. The rationales for every one of Kant's transcendental *a prioris* (from space and time to mathematics) are all just as weak as were the rationales for the ontological arguments for the existence of God that Kant criticized. Like every other rationalist fantasy ever posited (from the first god, to the idealist theories of Parmenides and Plato to all of the postmodern critical theories), just because they appear to provide possible desired solutions to problems of philosophy or religion (slave theory) does not mean that what they attempt to describe actually exists! In fact, every worthwhile practical effect they might possess can always be assessed by reducing their statuses to actual empirical objects or by employing them instrumentally *as purely imaginary* objects (without ever presupposing any actual existence). And whenever their (non-empirical) effects are not worthwhile, they can always be just as easily ignored with no untoward consequences ever ensuing (just like ignoring Santa Claus, or any of the interminable god theories, or realist theories of mathematics or logics, etc. whose otiose existence is only ever missed for irrelevant ulterior reasons). What is always actually being argued with each and every rationalist presupposition (*a priori*, absolute, ontology, morality, etc.) is that each of us is fundamentally separated from some part of our own life (of our subjectivity-in-our-own-objective-world), and that our own life-activity is thus in one way or another controlled or determined by — or depends in some important way on — what has been so fundamentally separated from us. While this alone is not an argument for slavery as a social institution, it can always function as (and is always immediately or eventually used as) an excuse or cover or basis for enslaving institutions, thus the appropriateness of the label "slave theory."[17]

The radical *reversal* of perspective of critical self-theory is then, not any sort of change of one approach to this kind of separation to another approach from another side (as from geocentric to heliocentric, or even from objective transcendence to transcendental subjectivity). *It is the refusal of any and all separations of any part of myself from myself.* Critical self-theory begins from the integrity of my life-activity, my fully-embodied, subjective/objective experience (or, better, presubjective and preobjective experience). I am my entire world, and my subjectivity and the objective world are both only conceptual abstractions constructed symbolically from my seamlessly lived, nonconceptual experience. This complete refusal of any self-alienation in self-

[17] It is no coincidence that this simple, but devastatingly incapacitating, inversion in the application of conceptual/linguistic rationality has persisted and spread through religion and philosophy and all other ideological forms of thought for over 10,000 years, ever since the dawn of civilizations. It has been so persistent and successful because self-alienation is self-enslavement in the sphere of consciousness, and as such it has been self-selected as the best match for the most comfortable forms of slave consciousness for anyone submitting to institutionalized slave systems. The pervasive absence of any easily available and understandable (public) alternative is no mere coincidence. This has been a "culture war" that was won by the slavers in the sphere of literacy from its beginnings, and that has progressively isolated and expunged the continuing resistance from within oral cultures, although it cannot triumph over our underlying preconceptual life-activity itself without the complete extermination of human life. The very structures of religion, philosophy and ideologies of all kinds all boil down to the simple, so far successfully seductive, bargain that if each of us will just agree to conceptually-alienate our life-activities and submit to our locally prevalent forms of modern slavery, then we will be allowed to "heal" the gaping wounds of this alienation through sublime identification with the unity of grand abstractions, grand narratives and grand institutions or identification with the postmodern sophistication of the latest, most hip intellectual clichés. What more could we ever ask?

theory is the minimal criterion for intellectual maturity — the achievement of genuinely lived autonomy, just as it is the necessary bedrock of any consistent refusal of *all forms* of slavery in our social (intersubjective) practice.

Making a *first distinction*

Using critical self-theory allows one to be aware that all living-experience and self-activity is fundamentally and originally non-conceptual. It is only when one — occasionally or frequently — begins using complex conceptual systems for communication within intricately-organized systems of exploitation, domination and enslavement that one is forced to remain vigilant at all times against all the traps set to disarm one's intelligence and resistance. Then it can become critical to remember that within each nonconceptual life-experience or self-activity in which one begins using concepts, one always begins by making a *first distinction*.

Within any ideological form of thinking (including all religion and philosophy), this *first distinction* always involves a fundamental self-division of one's experience of which one refuses and disavows any knowledge or responsibility for making. This hidden, self-alienating *first distinction* then becomes the logical basis for any and every religious, philosophical or ideological slave theories that might follow. (For a Kantian, if a Kantian could ever even be aware of it, this *passive-transcendental* self-alienating move could be called the condition of "transcendental slavery.") That is because this hidden, self-alienating *first distinction* is the continuous and consistent premise always necessary in order to conceive of oneself as a slave, rather than identifying with one's own self-creating activity in one's own world. More naive and less sophisticated forms of traditional religion and philosophy *do* — as Kant criticizes — concretize and reify abstract fantasies out of pure imagination to create speculative objective philosophies, cosmologies and religions to which humans find themselves passively *subjected*. But the Kantian turn to subjectivity merely concretizes and reifies abstract fantasies of transcendental subjectivity out of the same purely imaginary realm, to which humans also find themselves passively *subjected*. Both of these realms of subjection (in which human beings always find themselves as passive sufferers) result from hidden, self-alienating *first distinctions* between one or another form of subjectivity and objectivity (self and world, self and god, etc.) that each person *makes*, but refuses responsibility for ever herself or himself making.

Using critical self-theory allows one to be aware that this *first distinction* involves abstractly *self*-dividing one's preconceptual life-experience in two, usually (though not necessarily in all cases) characterizing the resulting abstract parts using concepts of subjectivity and objectivity in one form or another. From that point on, whenever using one or the other of these first conceptions one can more easily understand that they are each self-constructed abstractions that have no real meaning without each other, and no complete meaning without an awareness of their abstract conceptual nature and their intentionally self-constructed origin from nonconceptually-lived-experience. In addition, once one has conceptually broken one's lived experience into two abstract poles, a *third term* is always generated that conceptually connects them again into a conceptual (re-presented) whole. This *third term* conceptual representation of the whole should never, though, be confused with pre-distinguished, nonconceptual lived-activity, especially when it has been reified. The entire history of religion and philosophy and all of the grand ideologies can be viewed from one's own perspective using critical self-theory as a necessarily unsuccessful

history of attempting in a myriad of ways to conceptually glue back together to make a whole the abstract parts (using some reified variant of the *third term*) that people have unself-consciously severed in the first place in order to create their own self-alienations upon which their successful enslavement has always been built. The hidden conceptual history of all of civilization has been the development of more and more sophisticated attempts to abolish the original self-alienation that people have hidden from themselves by elaborating more and more convoluted attempts at conceptual resolution of the underlying, fetishized premise of absolute self-division (using increasingly abstract *third terms*). Critical self-theory is the dissolution of the conceptual problem of civilization by refusing any underlying, hidden division of one's life — any original self-alienation — each and every time one makes this *first distinction* within conceptual life-activity. The simple solution for abolishing human conceptual alienation? First, *consciously stop* alienating your own conceptual activity! Only then does it become more and more clear how to take the next steps to abolish all forms of modern slavery!

Anatomy of critical self-theory

Critical self-theory is the consciously or critically theoretical moment of our self-activity through which we refuse all self-alienation, and our unself-alienated self-activity is the self-creation of our lives while understanding ourselves as self-creators. Like symbolically-mediated self-theory, critical self-theory can be characterized as higher level organismic functioning that involves complex adaptation and organization of perceptual-motor abilities (including communicative efforts) to live in our world (our natural and social life context). The only difference is that all communicative efforts that include any use of symbols or symbolic systems are consciously and critically understood as our self-creations to the degree and level of awareness that we feel are necessary to prevent any self-alienation. The schematic anatomy of critical self-theory is: complex-nonsymbolict+symbolic-desire-or-problem *within the context of consciously resisting any* heternomous-theory-demands-to-submit-to-various-claims-of-higher-priority-more-real-entities. To the extent that the resulting practical activity manages to be satisfactory (satisfies the desire or solves the problem) as well as fends off all attempts at dividing oneself against oneself, and refuses any collaboration with enslaving institutions to the best of one's powers, its use is reinforced. And to the extent that the activity is unsatisfactory, it may be reconfigured or even avoided in similar future situations. Note that in this schematic consideration of the nature and meaning of abstract concepts — like self, world and especially abstract entities fetishized by other people (particularly those providing cover to enslaving institutions) can become of central importance for critique and refusal of reification. All that is involved is still fundamentally practical reason, but a practical reason that is threatened by pressures demanding one's self-alienation and submission to heteronomous powers. Everything that could be simple in a non-slave world, requires careful negotiation, including deception and lying in some circumstances, to avoid becoming victim to informers, cops and other professional enforcers for enslaving institutions. One may be forced to temporarily submit to more powerful forces (usually made up of large groups of ideological dupes — all the modern and post-modern zombie slaves) in order to survive and fight another day; or one may be able to evade, criticize or destabilize aspects of modern slave systems; or one may €ven openly defy or destroy aspects of these systems, depending upon one's judgment of what is possible, how Open those around are

to resistance, and what one can get away with in any given situation. But as long as one resists and refuses the self-division of self-alienation one may win or lose battles on any particular given terrain but still continue to evade and live as autonomously as possible while fighting to win the larger war against all forms of modern slavery.

Critical self-theory is our early-warning and our self-defense system, both of which are highly important in a world of nearly ubiquitous self-alienation and enslavement. In many situations critical self-theory is unnecessary, depending upon where we are and with whom we are associating and interacting. In relatively transparent and convivial or in socially-isolated natural surroundings dealing with sympathetic family and friends or with primarily non-human beings, we may need only rarely consider using critical self-theory in our communications. But when dealing with politicians, bureaucrats, the organizers and managers of wage labor, commodity commerce, police and legal systems, soldiers and military systems, etc. it may be necessary to keep constantly on guard. And, especially, when dealing with culture cops — journalism, mass entertainment and popular culture, teachers and professors at every level, priests and moralists and holy men, advertisers and recruiters and salesmen — critical self-theory may be essential to evading all the confidence games, keeping oneself intact, and avoiding every attempt made to neuter one's critical self-consciousness and harness oneself to every sort of heteronomously-directed machine, cause and project.

Critical self-theory

Critical self-theory is consciously-employed self-theory, the use of self-theory with an awareness that it is for each of us nothing more nor less than a technique (or set of techniques) for our practical negotiation and enjoyment of our world. Critical self-theory, most broadly, is consciously and critically thinking for oneself. At its deepest, most coherent levels critical self-theory involves a systematically self-critical attitude towards all of the tools we use to conceptualize, communicate, analyze, investigate, and intervene in our world. It does not stop short in order to leave any aspect of theory out-of-bounds to critique and it does not stop short from refusing submission to every heteronomous power or dogmatic principle. It is our own theoretical grasping of our own lives. When it is consistent and complete it leaves no room for any self-alienating theory: no religion, no ideology, no fixed reifications of our life experience at all. That means there is then no room for our manipulation or control by others through ideology (which, of course, says nothing about other power relations), because we already consciously and critically reject — or appropriate and reinterpret — every instance of reified language (and even non-linguistic symbols) from our own unself-alienated, lived perspective. We use symbols and language and refuse to be used by them.

Critical self-theory involves the refusal of any reified (normative, prescriptive, reductionist) conceptions of autonomy that most often bear little or no relationship to people's actually-lived intentions and desires. It involves the use of immanent critique to recognize and discover ways for actually-living people to claim or reclaim their own autonomous powers for themselves in their own particular relations with other people and with their world. Critical self-theory is not a philosophy or set of philosophies in any traditional sense of these words. It makes no transcendent claims at all. It remains completely an expression of one's own immanent, directly-lived experience, and is therefore an expression of one's own rationality, one's own values, and one's

own ways of living. Therefore it is not a philosophy of the ego, a philosophy of individualism, or a philosophy of anything else, since it proposes no fixed ideas, no self-alienations, and no reified abstractions, unlike every historical philosophy that has ever existed.

Critical self-theory does not *summarily* reject anything in any sensible (or halfway sensible, or even nonsensical) form of thought or practice in the world, aside from their dogmatic presuppositions, their conceptual fixations, their required self-alienations, and their unconsciously reified abstractions. Critical self-theory is the method by which anyone can critically appropriate any form of thought or practice by first destroying and eliminating its heteronomous elements and then making whatever of its aspects that one still values one's own in whatever manner one chooses. Critical self-theory makes no pretense to a perfect rationality according to any external measure. It is what it is and needs to be nothing more nor less. Critical self-theory proposes no particular ontological theories about who we are, no particular epistemological theories about how we know anything, no particular axiological or moral theories about what we need to do, no particular political-economic theories about how we should organize our lives together, and no particular aesthetic theories about how we should feel about or interpret or create works of art. Critical self-theory is merely the refusal of every possible form of self-alienation in the conception and practice of any of these theories. Critical self-theory includes no particular theory of subjectivity or objectivity or the self or world. But it does involve an insistence that how we act, think, communicate and identify ourselves is always a matter of our own choice subject to no outside measure.[18]

Most basically, using critical self-theory means the refusal to ever mistake one's reflections — one's conceptions or representations — for one's own lived-activity or lived-experience. It is to accept that I am fully self-creating, fully responsible for myself, and that I require no mediators in order to live my own life — no figure or person or thing to hide behind, understanding that I am my whole world and my whole world is my own self to the extent of all my powers.[19]

[18] "I am I only by this, that I make myself; that it is not another who makes me, but I must be my own work." — Max Stirner, *The Unique and Its Own* (1844).

[19] For those who have carefully read or studied Max Stirner's works you may recognize that my use of "self-theory," "critical self-theory" and "heteronomous theory" roughly mirrors the conceptual or theoretical levels of Stirner's "egoism," "conscious egoism" and "duped" or "unconscious egoism." Stirner's egoism itself is much, much wider in its reference to all self-activity, applying primarily at a preconceptual level as something similar to Brentano and Husserl's intentionality as mediation of subject and object, but *within* consciousness *and* every other activity. However, while Husserl's conception of intentionality originated from the largely solipsistic and dualistic, subjective attitudes of Descartes and Kant, Stirner's egoism originated from the preconceptual unity of the Unique, from within which the abstractions of subject and object are created, with the concept of egoism linking them as their *conceptual* unity. Stirner's anti-Cartesian egoism can thus be taken in some contexts as prior to the consciously conceptual division of subject and object coincident with the self-creation of conceptual or linguistically-mediated consciousness, although he also applies it to the conceptual (theoretical) level as well. While critical self-theory is my own formulation of themes I've spent a life-time developing, it obviously owes much to the world-historical genius of Max Stirner (and those who influenced him, especially G.W.F. Hegel, Ludwig Feuerbach and Bruno Bauer), as well as to the American anarchist Paul Goodman (*Gestalt Therapy*, *The Empire City*) and the Gestalt phenomenologist Maurice Merleau-Ponty (*The Phenomenology of Experience*, *The Prose of the World*, *The Visible and the Invisible*).

A brief history of theory

This history of theory begins with me and with you and with us (me & you & others) from within our own living perspectives. I construct this history *first* for myself — from within my perspective, according to my own desires, using the words and language-system I have already created for myself in my interactions and life with others (and largely shared with them) — and *secondarily* for you and others with whom I seek to communicate. You construct this history for yourself — from within your own perspective, according to your own desires, and by reading these words and similarly making some sense of them for yourself using the language-system you have already created for yourself in your interactions and life with others. Without all of this the history of theory I am writing and you are reading would not exist for me or for you or for us. This history of theory also begins immanently, originally without presuppositions — without any transcendent conditions, *a prioris*, necessities or absolutes, because I choose to insist on none. You may go along for the ride and construct this history for yourself as well without presuppositions, or you may insist on constructing it for yourself with presuppositions of your own choice. I have no ultimate say on your end, just as you have none on my end because each of us is ultimately alone in our own experiencing, and only together indirectly as our experience of each other's behaviors however we choose to recognize and interpret them.

This history continues with a speculative prehistory of the self-creation of myself in my world as best I can currently understand it by looking backwards, using all of the empirical cues I have acquired during my lifetime — and that I can recall here and now — to understand from whence I come. When examined it will be clear that any and everyone's history is constructed upon a prehistory, a background context from which one's own history itself emerges. From my self-creating experience — from my experience of continuing self-creation — I have come to understand that my self-creating began before my current reflective consciousness of my self-creating experience and beyond the explicit memories I retain. But from interaction with and observation of others as they have appeared with birth, matured and grown and become increasingly self-conscious through reflection and interactions, I can by analogy understand that I was born already self-creating, although without the power to retain much of my experience then as long-term memory, and without many other powers that I have since attained through physical maturation and my own interactive self-development within my world in every sphere of my activities. By analogous reasoning I can also understand that all other living organisms appear to be self-creating in similar ways to my own self-creating experience. But each of us (self-creating organisms) appear only as objects within each other's self-creating experience, although as complex objects whose unusual behaviors can be interpreted sympathetically — and eventually empathically — as self-creating analogously to my own self-creating experience. My prehistory tells me that my life-world includes my parents, siblings and relations including everyone with whom I've ever come into any contact — along with other non-human beings and objects in nature, but gives no clues as to any *ultimate* beginning, although it gives many clues as to a highly-probable ultimate end in death. My prehistory does give many clues as to *relative* origins of human historical life from within the prehistoric, presocial life early humans share with other social animals. From this prehistory I can flesh out a few fundamental understandings about the origins of my current historical understanding of myself, my history and our histories, apart and together.

These fundamental understandings include the inalienability of my own unique perspective which is always there whenever I look for it in any of my life-activities, and would seem to always be there even when I'm not looking for it, for example in my sleep or in my infancy. Without

my own unique perspective I find it impossible to imagine that *I* could have any experience of anything at all. These understandings also include the immanence of my own rationality — along with the immanence of symbolic conception and communication — within all of my experiencing of perception and activity. In almost every case I need not attempt to look outside of my own body and memories for any reasons for anything at all, except when I would like to access other people's conceptul maps and recipes for achieving complex goals that require navigational skills I would rather not take the time and effort to learn strictly on my own from scratch. And by analogy I understand that the people who developed these conceptual maps and recipes may also at times similarly wish to learn from the efforts and accomplishments of others in other spheres — sometimes even from my own efforts and accomplishments. When I now think of reason and rationality, in fact, it is always only my own rationality and reason that I care about, along with my own understanding of the rationality and reason of other people and other living organisms with which I may to some degree identify, sympathize or empathize. Rationality or Reason outside of myself and other organisms appears to be non-sensical, except as a fantastical projection onto conceptual creations like gods, spirits, other abstract constructions like nature or the universe, or abstract collective or cultural constructions like biospheres, species, societies, classes, nation-states, economies, languages, etc. As we have just seen, these prehistorical understandings are relatively continuous with my current historical understandings, since they have never been contradicted by them, but rather have always been reinforced and strengthened by them.

This history of theory itself then continues with my understanding that at one time human beings, already living presocially, prerationally pretheoretically and communicating directly but without use of conscious symbols, created the first intentional symbols, became increasingly fluent with them until they began to be used habitually, and eventually wove them into relatively systematic word usages understood by larger and larger communities. Before this development there could be no such things as conceptual creations like gods, spirits, abstract beings like nature, or abstract collective beings like, species, societies, classes, nation-states or languages because all of these exist primarily as conceptions whose realities exist only to the extent that they are parasitic on the nonconceptual (actually-living) realm. With this development of symbolic communication people were able to coordinate their interactivities, moving from presocial to interpersonal interactions and recognition, from prerational to increasingly rational interactions and recognition, and from pretheoretical to increasingly theoretical activities. But this also made reification possible, and with the creation of reifications, also choices of conceptual self-creation or self-alienation.

Initially, the temptations of conceptual self-alienation over conceptual self-creation were most likely fleeting. Why create and brood over self-alienations unless one is trapped and somehow unable to enjoy life with kins-people, animal and plant kin, and the world of plenitude and play. With the development of generalized and increasingly systematic word-usages communal stories began to be created and told. Stories of travels and heroic hunts, stories of occasional encounters with strange non-kin people, and stories of animal and ancestors began to be created and told. Story-telling became an art, along with already present forms of tool-making, hunting, food gathering and preparation, shelter-building, drumming, humming, singing, dancing, etc. With the widening of the conceptually communicative world, every sphere of human life gained in conceptually-mediated range, complexity and cooperative interactivity. But with catastrophe, however occasional or frequent, and whether through ravages of weather, floods, fires, pests, or

even self-created conflicts, injuries, death or destruction, suffering and brooding must have eventually led to the creation of stories of vengeful, vicious and violent spirits and gods. But still, with good times these stories would always recede, and be recounted only occasionally as warnings. Until the *big* catastrophe hit, and one of the story-tellers insisted that one of the vicious, vengeful and violent spirits was at work behind it because the spirit was angry with people. At first, only a few believed this story-teller. But after more catastrophes hit over the years and lifetimes, and were recounted around hearths once fire was largely domesticated, the story-tellers were now specialists, shamans. And by now some kinspeople had become more powerful than others, even though kept in — at times uneasy — check with increased obligations that people imposed with the increased status they accorded them. And eventually, people learned how to not only help favored plants grow, but to sow seeds, and not only to hunt, but to domesticate the least-resisting animals. Until at some point the kin-groups grew larger and the occasionally-propitiated spirits and gods became relatively permanent along with an increasing influence of shamans or priests who spoke for them. The relatively fluid roles of kin leadership became more and more solidified in certain powerful figures, food gathering and hunting became increasingly specialized in particular groups, and occasionally — with the backing of priests — intimidation or even violent force was used by the more powerful to compel some people to work more than others at particular tasks for the gods and the kin-group like monument building or collection of surplus food stores. And, with the gods approval, sometimes conflicts with other hostile neighboring groups led to the capture and temporary enslavement of a few non-kin aliens, before they escaped or were assimilated, traded or killed.

Then the *great* catastrophe hit: war, destruction, mass-captivity and relatively permanent enslavement! The most vicious, vengeful and violent gods were now victorious over both kin and the enslaved non-kin alike. The hierarchy of spirits and gods was solidified. The priests and the warriors stood apart and above the common kin. The non-kin slaves cowered below. This was the beginning of civilization. And with civilizatiom came the aggregation of subjugated kin-groups. Some were enslaved, others became underling satellites or allies. Others were exterminated to the last child. Warfare enlarged, militarized villages became city-states, the techics of war constantly developed, including the technics of religious ideology for kin social-control, non-kin subjugation and mass mobilizations of all for great surplus-building projects and great wars. The status of kin and slaves became increasingly differentiated into degrees and types, with some *slaves* ending up with higher status and powers than lower-statuses of *kin* (until they eventually fused and all kin and non-kin became free citizen-slaves in modernity). The hierarchies, histories and laws of the true victorious gods were systematized, indoctrinated and symbolized in great temples and tablets, as well as the high prestige and status of priests, chiefs and kings and emperors who did their bidding, and sometimes even claimed godly status. With the symbolic tabulation of grain stores, the recording of hierarchies and dynastic histories, and the compilation of the laws of gods and kings came the origin of theology and the age of the great religions revealed in the Word. And finally, all of the spirits and gods of the peoples of the known world were defeated and consolidated by the victorious One True God and his own hierarchy of underlings, down to his priests. And each of the One True Gods ruled and continue to rule wherever (and to the extent that) their earthly minions hold power.

Occasionally, errant priests or scribes — or even self-educated sages — would take off on their own outside the bounds of official state-religious hierarchies. Often they were killed or imprisoned as heretics, but in some places they were tolerated — or, rarely, even encouraged — as long

as they were no serious threat to the priests, warriors and archons or kings. Although most initially told stories of folk spirits and gods, or occasionally stories of strange new gods or spirits, in particularly encouraging circumstances in particular places like ancient Greece they began to tell more intricate stories whose logics worked their ways into areas of common-sense knowledge — or occasionally into hierarchical spheres of knowledge — in sometimes powerful ways and became known as philosophers. As the stories of philosophers became more widespread as well as more systematized they tended to follow either the primary road of interpreting and reinforcing reigning theologies or to some degree criticizing or challenging them — in order to either promote alternative theologies or alternatives to theological explanations. But all forms of ancient or traditional philosophy retained two basic assumptions: that some sort of reason or rationality is the ultimate guide (whether it comes from Gods or Nature) and that people are beholden to this reason, while reason is never (aside from merely practical matters) beholden to people.

With the gradual advent of modernity the previous unities of religious, political-economic and cultural spheres were fragmented and realigned with the replacement of serfdom (forms of slavery tied to land), debt-slavery, bond-slavery and chattel slavery with a wage-slavery, that was effectively abolished from awareness simply by renaming it "free labor." The nation-state replaced kingdoms and empires, and eventually the liberal democratic — or liberal social-democratic — nation-state became the generally accepted state form, symbolically elevating first property-owners and later wage slaves as well to electors for governments, effectively creating, at least to some degree, wage-slave republics, given the majority status of the wage-slave populations in most nation-states. (This was especially true once the peasantry was driven from the land in many areas and replaced by agricultural wage-slaves.) To do this the commons was progressively abolished and appropriated by large property-owners and industrialists, nation-states and local government bodies, and what is left (the atmosphere, the earth's core and mantle, genetic codes, outer space) is still being progressively appropriated by modern corporations with the help of governments at all levels. With the rise of market capitalism, industrial commodity production, the increasing ubiquity of wage-labor, and the colonization and displacement of folk cultures by compulsory schooling and mass media (print, radio, cinema, TV, internet), the development of social, political, economic and cultural ideologies gained great importance for social control, especially to replace the drastic decline in religious control of many spheres. In Europe modern ideologies were Often allied with, interpenetrated with, or were modeled on Protestant religious doctrines, which successfully recuperated rebellious peasantries throughout Europe for the evolving Christian capitalist civilization. The Protestant Reformation proceeded apace with the beginnings of the Scientific and Industrial Revolutions, European colonization and despoliation of the Earth, and the reinvention of genocides and world wars on industrialized scales. For a while it appeared that the burgeoning and at times anarchic working class might successfully derail this process, but the trade unions and social democratic parties of the left — and in the extreme cases of social revolution, the Marxist-Leninist, Stalinist and Maoist parties — successfully reintegrated working class rebellion to save civilization and keep it safe for modern slavery, largely on the strength of their recuperative ideologies.

The relative mobility and protean instability of the new capitalist orders in which resources, technologies, labor and trade spilled across borders required new modes of systematic social control to maintain elites in power over the burgeoning multitudes of wage slaves. As military and political power became increasingly dependent upon industrial production and wealth, which were in turn increasingly dependent upon resource control and technical advances in produc-

tion and distribution, great advantages were conferred on those industries and nation-states able to best integrate wage slaves into their production, consumption and militarization cycles in the most effective ways (Fordism or republicanism, for example). At times this has led to the rise and fall of various industries, nation-states, state alliances and empires. The American empire is just the latest on the cusp of collapse. But capitalist civilization continues to survive despite its unstable foundations on modern slavery — redefined as modern freedom and autonomy by modern and postmodern ideologies. Although there are always clouds on the horizon, no storm is yet approaching. But what might happen when genuinely critical forms of self-theory appear on the scene?

The Anarchist Library
Anti-Copyright

Jason McQuinn
Critical Self-Theory
& the non-ideological critique of ideology
Spring-Summer 2014

Modern Slavery #3
"A brief history of theory" is a multi-page sidebar beginning about halfway through the text. The original text has two inline references to footnote 12; I've removed the first (following the line "using laws to enslave themselves and others"), as the text of the footnote more directly relates to the second reference, and it was causing problems with the software here. The inline reference to footnote 14 does not appear in the original text; I've added it where it seemed to fit best based on content/context, but there are other places between the references to 13 and 15 it could work as well.

theanarchistlibrary.org